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COMRADE-CHRIST

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THE
COMRADE-CHRIST

AND OTHER SERMONS

BY

W. J. DAWSON

MINISTER OF Highbury Quadrant Church

LONDON

ISBISTER AND COMPANY LIMITED

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PREFACE

IN publishing a volume of sermons there are several considerations which any author who is sensitive to the quality of his work must needs weigh.

First, there is the question whether the printed discourse should retain the hortatory form of the spoken sermon, or be modified to a more literary mould. I have decided that, so far as the form of these discourses is concerned, it is best to leave it untouched. A sermon is an appeal, and depends greatly on the personal element that vitalises it; a sermon, retouched with a view to literary form, usually becomes only an indifferent essay. In some insignificant respects modifications have been necessary, but essentially these sermons are printed as they were preached.

A second question touches the scope of the book. Every preacher knows that his sermons display wide variations of quality, and no preacher would be willing or wise to print his more indifferent discourses. Still, a book that is composed only of what are called "special" sermons is apt to be tedious reading, and it often happens that a plain sermon on a simple theme is of far more real service than the purposely elaborate effort. I have sought in

this volume to avoid the special and stand by the normal. Competitive preaching is a thing to be abhorred, and equally the competitive publication of sermons. Therefore I have chosen for this volume sermons which have been preached to my own people, and which represent my normal ministry. I have done so because it seems the more honest way of publishing sermons, and because I have learned that edification is better worth coveting than adulation.

Lastly, a question arises as to the roots out of which these sermons have grown. In preparing a sermon on the last day of the week, as is my habit, I invariably find that all the reading of the week, and much besides that lies in the more remote recesses of the memory, insensibly drains itself into the sermon. It is not easy to trace these sources of suggestion at the time when the sermon is prepared, but after even a month or two it becomes impossible. I have not, therefore, attempted the task. But not the less I thankfully acknowledge hints and suggestions from many sources, of which, so far as I know, I have made an entirely honest use. In quoting from any known author, I have endeavoured in every case to mention the author's name, or to use quotation marks: if in any instance it is omitted, it is because the memory has supplied a reminiscence of the thought or sentiment, but has not been equally vigilant in the matter of names and titles.

W. J. DAWSON.

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PART I

CHRIST AND HIS TEACHING

"But what I want to know is this," said Trevor : "the Christ of the Churches is incomprehensible to me : probably is to most people, even to the bishops and theologians themselves, if they dared confess it. Can you tell me how to find the real Jesus ? "

"Yes," said Rutherford, "I think I can. You will find the real Jesus when you discover that Jesus was a Man."

Conversation in Common Room, Oxford.

" For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil. The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners."

MATTHEW xi. 18, 19.

THE COMRADE-CHRIST

QUITE apart from all questions of personal religion or theology, there is no intelligent man who can afford to ignore the presence of Christ in history. "The Son of Man came"—it is a sentence which opens new worlds. The importance of that supreme advent is testified in the very chronology of the world: history divides itself into that which is before Christ, and that which is after the year of the Lord. This strange divine apparition stands upon the threshold of the past, and rivets the gaze of the ages as they pass. No one has ever seriously approached the study of Christ without memorable results to himself. Those who have commenced that study with indifference have gradually been fascinated; those who have begun with hostility have been softened into pity or melted into adoration. George Eliot tells us that she could only translate Strauss with the crucifix, that touched tenderer emotions, before her; Renan, in spite of his scepticism, exclaims in his last writings: "Jesus is altogether unique, and nothing can be compared to Him. Athens and Rome have adopted Him; the barbarians have fallen at His feet; rationalism dare

not look at Him at all fixedly, except when on its knees before Him. His beauty is eternal, His reign will have no end!" "Whence hath this man these things?" is a cry which is echoed by the astonishment of the ages. "What think ye of Christ?" is a question which has been passed from lip to lip for nearly nineteen centuries. Therefore, I say that, apart from all matters of personal religion or belief, this question is so imperative that no man of intelligence can afford to ignore it.

"The Son of Man came." Who, then, was this Son of Man? What was His significance in the world? What did He really mean to do, and how is His life to be read? A partial reply to these questions is given us in this passage, which contains the presentation of the human-hearted Christ, and it teaches us the method by which He interpreted and elevated humanity.

First of all, let us reconstruct the picture which is painted for us in the passage. There is little need to say anything of the condition of Jewish society as Christ found it. It was corrupt, not with the sensual corruption which destroyed Greece and Rome, but with the more subtle and fatal corruption of an essentially religious nation which had lost hold on reality. The man who has no God is not so hopelessly lost as the man who has a God whom he has ceased to obey. The man who has no religion is really better off than the man who holds the form of a religion, but despises its sanctions. It is from the finest herbs that the deadliest poisons are dis-

tilled; it is precisely the noblest truth which becomes most deadly in its perversion. And this was the case with Jewish society in Christ's time. The Jew had the loftiest religion then extant upon earth, but he had degraded it by the most ignoble uses. Reality, "sacred reality," had ceased to find adoration among the people. To assent to a truth counted for more than being truthful; to have a sound creed was more essential than living a right life. The entire essence of Pharisaism lies in that sentence; and let us remember that Pharisaism is something that outlives the centuries, and which in turn has poisoned every creed. It exists to-day. The very evil that Christ sought to extirpate has taken refuge in the bosom of the religion which bears His name, and if the Son of Man came again, it is in His own Church that His direst enemies would be found.

Now, there are two ways of reforming a corrupt society: either by destruction or construction, by surgery or medicine. You may cut away the bad flesh, the poisoned tissues; or you may introduce a new element of growth and health, which will slowly overcome the virulence of disease, and build up a new body. The first method was John the Baptist's, the second method was Christ's. John applied the cautery and the surgeon's knife with a fearless hand. Here is the description which he gives of his method: "Now also is the axe laid to the root of the tree: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire." His aim

was to purge the nation. He knew no half-measures ; the fire and the axe, the cautery and the surgeon's knife were his weapons. He dwelt apart from men. He lived in the desert, and descended on the city like an avalanche, a thunderstorm, a torrent. A sacred anger burned in him, he was a man of flame. He was a necessary man ; in corrupt ages no men are more necessary than men of his order—stern, prophetic, incorruptible, strong as the storm, vehement as the flash of lightning, direct and overwhelming as the hurricane. But while the storm and the hurricane may purge the world, it is the slow toil of the seasons which transforms sterility into verdure, barrenness into beauty and fertility.

John failed, and there is a reason why he failed—he stood too much outside humanity. He was a dislocated unit in the human family ; he worked on society from the outside instead of from within. The difference with Christ was that He was essentially of the race, a force that was social and penetrative, leavening society from within. John applied the surgery that probed the wound ; Jesus the medicine that built up the new tissue. John laid down practical rules for conduct, outward rules ; Jesus put His finger on the pulses of the heart, and by quieting and cleansing the heart sought to re-shape the conduct. John came as an ascetic ; Jesus as a genial factor in society. John was the last of the prophets, a man of Elijah-grandeur and Elijah-temper ; Jesus was more than a prophet, He was the Son of Man. And, quite characteristically, society misunderstood them

both. Men said of John that he was a fanatic, that he had a devil and was mad ; of Jesus they said : "Behold a winebibber and a glutton, a friend of publicans and sinners."

Now let us analyse what this taunt meant, and thus endeavour to obtain a vision of this real Jesus as men saw Him. And as I look into the depths of this text the first thing which I think I see is the Genial Christ. Observe Him as He moves through the Gospel narratives ; how simple, how unaffected, how social He is. He is very seldom alone ; on the mountain, on the sea, in the city, there is always some one with Him. His first act on beginning His mission is to call disciples, a bodyguard of friends, among whom He lived in the most familiar intimacy. He has an instinct, a very genius for friendship. When He seeks the desert, the multitudes follow Him—they cannot keep away—and He feeds them as they sit on the green grass in their companies. John never fed anybody ; he fed himself very badly. But Jesus has the quick and eager sympathy which interprets to Him the lowliest wants of His followers. Even while His lips utter beatitudes and parables so perfect in thought and form that the treasures of kings' houses were poverty beside them, he notices that there is a tired mother in the crowd, a sad-looking centurion, a cripple, a beggar, and He detects that His flock is hungry. He is not above admitting that men are bodies as well as souls, and must needs therefore spend some time in eating and drinking. He gives Himself no airs ; any one may

speak to Him who will, and He will go home to dinner with any one, even though it be Zaccheus the publican. We feel that there is something slightly theatrical about John's leathern girdle and camel's-hair raiment ; he had unconsciously dressed for the part. But Jesus never sought to be conspicuous by singularity. It is not until He is dead that we know what He wore ; when He was alive men were too deeply interested in *Him* to take much note of His raiment. And so we see Him move through those crowded little Eastern towns, or sail upon the tranquil lake, or walk through the yellow corn-fields, always with friends around Him, a simple, kindly, genial presence ; one with men, loving men, bringing with Him a warm atmosphere of kindliness and grace. Surely the most lovable figure in history is this Genial Christ, who came eating and drinking, and was the friend of publicans and sinners.

But there was something wider and deeper than geniality : I think there was also a radiant joyousness about Christ. Does not this passage hint at what, in its best sense, was doubtless true, that Jesus enjoyed life ? Is it a wholly sad or solemn presence we see moving through these Gospel narratives ? Do people follow men who have no charm, do little children seek the sad and sombre-browed, or do women contend to lay their children in the arms of such ? Let the mists arise, and let us look upon the real Christ. Let the Christ of convention disappear, and the Christ of reality emerge before us. Let us forget the thousands

of pictures of the dead and dying Christ which fill the galleries and churches of the world, the Christ of the Catholic crucifix and wayside Calvary, and look upon this comrade-Christ, whose smile falls like sunlight on the crowd, and whose charm draws the very outcasts of society after Him. The Man of Sorrows He was, but not that alone: He was equally the Man of Joy, or He could not have been the Son of Man. He healed the sick, but we never read that He was sick: rather we conceive Him as clothed with radiant vitality and eternal youth. He who was to bring light to those who sat in darkness and the shadow of death, had within His own eyes a divine radiance: He who said, I am the Light, wore no clouded brow: He who was the express image of God, who giveth us all things richly to enjoy, surely was an apparition of joy and hope to the eyes of those who felt the whole world altered by His entrance into it. When the genius of the Greek would picture the entrance of his god into a disconsolate and tragic world, he cries that with the coming of the god,

Suddenly a splendour like the morn
Pervaded all the beetling gloomy steeps,
All the sad spaces of oblivion,
And every gulf and every chasm old,
And every height, and every sullen depth,
Voiceless and hoarse with loud tormented streams,
And all the everlasting cataracts,
And all the headlong torrents far and near,
Mantled before in darkness and huge shade,
Now saw the light.

And it was so, and rightly, that the prophet pictured the coming of Christ, the Day-spring from on high, the bright and morning Star, the Desire of all nations, Christ the Joy of the world, through and in whom all joy throughout the world should be rekindled, reduplicated, and re-born.

No doubt it is difficult to express such truths as these without a seeming irreverence, yet here we find our first lesson—that the Christian is he who should enjoy this world in the widest and noblest sense. He comes eating and drinking. His life is made noble, not by the narrowness of its exclusions, but by the breadth of its inclusions, and by a certain radiant sanity that holds his conduct in perfect balance. The gift of Christ is more abundant life, which surely means a certain lofty fulness of life, a life of wider horizons and joyous outlook. There is nothing common or unclean to the true disciple of Christ: he brings with him the spirit which ennobles all. He uses the world as not abusing it, viewing it in a true perspective, and accepting it with serenity and thankfulness. He is the most joyous of men, because his joy has the truest source, and is neither foolish nor thoughtless, but springs from a perfect harmony with the God of good and joy. Is this so with us? Are we the sort of persons to whom sick people turn instinctively for help, and disheartened people for hope, and disinherited people for social redemption? Have we that charm of nature which is so gracious and kindly that it makes us friends, and multiplies love around

us? For this is the Christ of the Gospels: genial, joyous, human-hearted, apt at comradeship, with a genius for friendship: Behold the Son of Man comes eating and drinking, and is a friend of publicans and sinners.

But as I look further into the depths of this text I think I discover also the Brotherly Christ.

To be brotherly toward John—no, that was impossible. We feel at once that the word is misapplied. He wandered—

A phantom among men, companionless,
As the last cloud of an expiring storm,
Whose thunder is its knell.

The solitude suited him: he was not a man who completed the joy of firesides with his presence. But Jesus struck the large and resonant note of brotherhood from the first. He sought out imperfect and bigoted men like Peter and John: He was a fisherman with fishermen: He took into the hospitality of His affection every species of wounded, depressed, and lamentable life. Brotherliness is so rare a virtue that there is none that is at once more valued or oftener misunderstood. We pardon everything of rough speech and narrow prejudice to old Dr. Johnson when we remember how he opened his house to the unfortunate; and we almost cease to admire the genius of much greater men when we find them churlish, sour, seclusive, and contemptuous of mankind. The truly great man never fails to have faith in his kind and affection for them: this is his sign, and note, and character.

It was the supreme note of Jesus: He loved mankind.

*No. B.
value of Man. X
had true Jews,
value of man*

And love for mankind, and the sense of brotherhood with men, spring from two sources, the first of which is respect for humanity as such. The originality of Christ's view of society lay in the value He put upon man as man, and His corresponding faith in him. I am aware that this does not sound original at all—it sounds like a commonplace; only, you see, commonplaces are the most original things in the world when you really believe them. To have a sense of the value of man—that sounds an absolutely trite commonplace, does it? Believe it, it will be no more a commonplace: act upon it, and you will probably be locked up as a madman. For this is what it means, that practically no one in Christ's day, and very few people in our own, have any sense whatever of the value of man. It was one of the glorious hopes of Isaiah that the day would come when God would make a "man more precious than fine gold, even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir." Did Rome believe that? Rome was absolutely careless of human life, and sacrificed whole holocausts of men upon the battlefield or in gladiatorial combats. Did the Jews believe that? The pious Jew would let the cripple moan unhelped on the Sabbath, but would drag his ass out of a pit, and Christ had to ask these callous hypocrites whether a man was not of more value than a sheep or an ass? Does modern Europe believe in the value of man as man? Not while vast armies wait the word to fly at

anah

each other's throats, and the poor in a thousand cities are forced to give their lives for a crust of bread. Does modern England believe it? Not while sweating-dens exist; not while rotten ships, meant to founder, are sent to sea; not while men who wear broadcloth and sit in churches draw their revenues from human rookeries, where indecency is a necessity and infamy a law. The wedge of Ophir is still more precious than a man. We value wealth above manhood, and we are willing to crush the manhood of others and debase our own for the golden wedge of Ophir. We do not of course acknowledge so much: on the contrary, we sing with fervour—
A.B.

Rank is but the guinea stamp,
A man's a man for a' that;

or recite with emphasis,

'Tis only noble to be good,
Kind hearts are more than coronets,
And simple faith than Norman blood.

But we confine our sense of the value of man to *A.B.* poetry, and we forget it when we come to fact. The originality of Christ was that He both believed and acted on it. He thought man worth dying for. He saw in him something that demanded the agony of the cross. To save a man, to uplift a Zaccheus into nobler visions of truth, to recall a Magdalene to purity, to teach a wavering Peter how to free his better elements from the Galilean dross of cowardly flesh, to make him see that to be good was the only bliss, to love God and man the one all-comprehensive *g*

↑duty: that was to Christ more than all the gold of Ophir, more than the throne of David, more than the kingship of all the kingdoms of the world. There is nothing so original as sincerity. For one day act only on your highest beliefs without fear, and you will be astonished to find how much men are astonished at you.

And how wonderfully is this respect for humanity, as such, illustrated in the entire story of Jesus. He loved to seek out and magnify the best qualities of men. He discerns faith in a Syrophœnician woman, innocent-heartedness in Nathaniel, fine rectitude of character in the rich young ruler. He never speaks ill of human nature; He could not have uttered His beatitudes unless He had believed men capable of realising them. The disciples show from time to time how different is their spirit. They want to send the multitude away when Christ has talked to them; they have no idea of feeding a host of hungry camp-followers. They try to keep sick people from Him, and ask them why they trouble the Master? They can see no beauty in the emulation of mothers who only want Christ to bless their children; they, poor little narrow souls that they are, rebuke them!

Trouble the Master? You could not do that if you wanted anything that He was able to give! For the second element of brotherliness is sympathy—sympathy which interprets the wishes of other people, and admits their claim, and seeks to meet it. That is the true definition of the word "gentleman": the gentleman is he whose intuitive sympathy interprets

the wishes of others, measures their feelings, judges how they will look at things, and therefore touches them gently, so that the sore place shall not smart, and the hidden bruise shall not ache by coarse handling. The old divine who said that Christ was the greatest gentleman who ever lived, felt this truth about Him, and expressed no more than the truth. Why did Christ eat and drink with publicans? Not because the table allured Him, we may be sure, for His own doctrine was to take no thought for food and raiment; but because He appreciated these attempts of ostracised men and women to show Him a kindness; He knew them not as publicans and sinners, but as brothers and sisters. Would they have asked John to dinner? Not they. John meant well, but to sit at meat with publicans and sinners was beyond him. To his stern mind it would have seemed like selling the truth for a meal, like lowering his prophetic standard, like a descent into worldliness and frivolity. But Christ judged differently, and by His behaviour at the tables of publicans and sinners taught them to respect themselves because He respected them; and when He went away He left behind Him the quickening leaven of His gentle rebuke, of His temperance and restraint, of His dignity and joyousness, as an uplifting force, to act for ever on these poor discredited lives. Men admired John, they loved Jesus; between the two sentiments a firmament is spread, and the measure of it is the brotherliness of Christ.

It is related that one day, when Bonaparte was

walking on a narrow mountain path in St. Helena, he met a heavily burdened porter. The gentlemen of his suite hastily bade the porter stand aside for the ex-Emperor to pass. "No!" said Bonaparte, "it is for us to stand aside. Respect the burden!" It was a flash out of the remembered past; for, whatever faults Bonaparte had, he never forgot the pit from whence he was digged, and the rock from which he was hewn. He had been poor himself, and he could feel for poverty; he had carried burdens, and knew what they meant. And, in the widest possible application of the phrase, it becomes us to respect the burdens of society. The genius of Christ's brotherliness lay in that. He saw mankind as sheep not having a shepherd; He saw with quick insight the nature of their lives, and the burdens that lay upon their hearts, upon their souls. Only the man who has this intuitive sympathy with men as men will really help them. He will enter into their lives, he will interpret the things they cannot say, and will lead them toward the things they only dimly yearn for and even feebly comprehend. Brotherliness—that is the keynote of Christian conquest, for if the Church is not brotherly it is nothing. When the Church loses that spirit it becomes just what Pharisaism was, and toward those who do eat with publicans and sinners can only fling the sour and spiteful gibe, "a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber." Absolute democratic brotherliness was the temper of Christ, and nothing less than this must be the temper of His Church.

But, once more, as I look into this text I think I discern the Unconventional Christ.

Christ asserted as strongly as John reality against convention: in this they were of one temper. He cared absolutely nothing for what men thought of Him, and no man who cares for the foolish "they say" of society will ever be worth his salt. Why should he not eat with the publican? Was the bread poisoned or the wine sour, because it was dispensed by a man who made no loud pretence of piety? Christ's experience of persons who professed piety was that, upon the whole, they were worse and not better than those who did not. Why should He wash His hands before He sat down to meat? It was a right enough act in itself, but when the interpreters of the law made the omission of the act a crime equal to homicide, it was time to make a protest. Why should He not pluck the corn on the Sabbath-day? These men who talked piously about Sabbath-day journeys evaded the law themselves by every species of mean ingenuity, one of which was to place a loaf of bread somewhere beyond the legal limit, because the law permitted a man to travel as far as he pleased if it was to fetch food. Christ resented the lying hypocrisy of it all, and acted on His sense of the sacredness of reality. It needed courage: no one has ever yet done justice to the courage of Christ. It was the simplest of duties, but it really meant redemption for the soul of man; it was the assertion of the human conscience, the liberation of the human reason, the vindication of sacred reality.

It is not merely by the cross, by tragic culminating sacrifices and heroisms, but by comparatively humble acts of daily courage like these, that the soul works out its salvation. To be on the side of Jesus is not to stand up for a creed, or a theory of inspiration, or even for the Bible ; it is to stand up for reality, for plain right, for manifest duty, against Pharisaism, and hypocrisy, and those conventional distinctions which confuse the conscience and disfranchise from the liberty of truth men, our brothers, anywhere. The man who has not learned to despise the cackle of society, and do right in scorn of consequence, can never truly enter into the spirit of Christ. Society will lie equally about John and Jesus : it calls the moral enthusiasm of John madness, and the sweet geniality of Jesus gluttony and drunkenness ; and therefore the man who would be like Christ must listen to the authoritative voice of his own conscience alone, and be careless of what the world says so long as the unconquerable soul within him applauds. That is the unconventionality of Christ, and it is an unconventionality which is but another word for that passion for reality without which progress is impossible, and the final victory of moral ideas an idle dream.

And now are we able to measure the full significance of the title by which Christ called Himself—the Son of Man ? It is the commonest of all titles, but also the greatest and the most catholic. “ Where was He born ? ” we ask. The answer is, In Judæa. Of what blood ? A Jew of the Jews. Named by

what name? A Jewish name. Living where and how? In the obscurest strip of country that ever claimed a national history. But it was not thus that He interpreted Himself, nor has the world interpreted Him thus. He discerned in Himself elemental humanity. He felt Himself to be mankind incarnate not less than God incarnate. His patriotism embraced the world: He felt that he had relations to every race and every age. We also are sons of men, and the work that Christ did, we, in our measure, can also do. It needs no divine attributes to recognise the good in an alien Zaccheus, to be sympathetic toward the despised, and merciful toward the fallen. We also have relations to the race because we are the product of the race. Infinite ages have gone to our making. Multitudes of passionate and tranquil lives, of toiling and suffering men and women, through a long unrecorded past, have contributed to our being. Prayers uttered, martyrdoms endured, heroisms performed a thousand years ago, have transmitted to us a higher power to pray, a nobler capacity to aspire and to endure. In the rings of the oak we can read its age and history: in ourselves, if we had the vision, we might read the story of our making. What unnumbered, unremembered lives have fed the great tree of humanity, of which we are the latest fruit! What an array of infinite fibres bind us to the entire past of the race! For we also are sons of men; and the great lesson of Christ is that, because the race has borne us, we owe a duty to the race; because we are sons of

men, our obligation is to seek and save the lost, even as He did who was flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone ; Humanity incarnate, as well as God born in the flesh, and thus suffering in the sins, rejoicing in the goodness, of the least of us.

The Son of Man came, and it was the advent of this great and thus gracious One which has filled the world with hope. Once more consider His method—the genial, brotherly, and unconventional Christ, who aims at changing society from within by imparting to it a new spirit. Do any of us question the wisdom of the method ? Do we remonstrate timidly, “ How perilous a crusade ! ” Do we question whether the world is really better helped by geniality than austerity, and ask whether the teachers of truth ought not to live apart, to be very careful of their company, and on no account mix on familiar terms with the worldly ? I know which is the easier method : it is John’s. I know which is the harder and more difficult method : it is Christ’s. John’s method builds monasteries : Christ’s method distributes disciples throughout society, and makes each, in proportion as he is faithful to his ideals, a centre of light and love. We are called not to forsake the world, but to live in the world, and so to live that we may teach men by our tolerance, our truthfulness, our chastity, our unselfishness, our moderation, our brotherly and sincere temper, that a perfect life is possible, which shall be at once virile and pure, joyous and noble, human in its interests and outlook, and yet heavenly in its spirit, and devout in its aims

and aspirations. That is the Christianity which men want—real, genial, and brotherly—and when such a Christianity becomes universal the Advent bells will ring in not merely the memory of the birth of Christ, but the hour of His coronation, the supremacy of His eternal Kingdom. O bells of the Kingdom of God, hasten, hasten to ring in this true Church of the Son of Man !

Ring out false pride in place and blood,
The civic slander and the spite :
Ring in the love of truth and right,
Ring in the common love of good.

Ring out old shapes of foul disease ;
Ring out the narrowing lust of gold ;
Ring out the thousand wars of old,
Ring in the thousand years of peace.

Ring in the valiant man and free,
The larger heart, the kindlier hand ;
Ring out the darkness of the land,
Ring in the Christ that is to be.

THE BEGINNING OF THE MINISTRY

"And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up ; and, as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath-day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto Him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when He opened the book, He found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor : He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord."—LUKE iv. 16-19.

THE BEGINNING OF THE MINISTRY

WE are the witnesses in this incident of the opening of a ministry which has changed the world. Simple and idyllic as the passage reads, yet we hear in it the chiming of those bells which rang in a new era of time and a re-birth of humanity. The scene is the small and obscure town of Nazareth, which derives immortal interest to the whole world to-day from the fact that it was there that the childhood of Jesus ripened into youth; it was there that He learned the great lessons of obedience and labour. It is the Sabbath-day, bright and clear, with the cloudless splendour of the East, and Nazareth gathers to its customary worship. Probably on this day there would be a larger attendance than usual, because the rumour that Jesus is expected in the synagogue has gone abroad. Already we read that the fame of Him had filled the land, a fame which excites only wonder and incredulity in Nazareth, for how is it possible to believe in the prophetic claims of one who has been your playmate, of the artisan whose humble presence has been familiar to you from your child-

hood? But curiosity and incredulity are, nevertheless, strong factors in rousing public attention, and when Jesus entered the synagogue we read that the eyes of all were fixed upon Him.

Can we picture what was the vision they saw that Sabbath morning? Can we imagine what was that face and form which the art of man has vainly striven to fix in immortal revelation? There are two ways of painting Christ: a realistic way, which gives us Christ in the absolute humiliation of His humanity—shall we say Munkacsy's way? There is the other Christ, clothed in a majesty of form that is superhuman, the angelic Christ—shall we say Sir Noel Paton's way? By neither method is Christ truly interpreted. It seems to me that they alike fail who paint Christ only as the artisan, the child of the people, and they fail equally who give his face a supernal sweetness and visionary grace. Labour, no doubt, had left its mark upon Him, and this, perhaps, had much to do with the appeal which He never made in vain to the children of labour—men like John and Simon Peter. But there must also have been a certain radiance and majesty, a subduing dignity and authority, about that face whose glance could break Peter's heart, and before whose divine tranquillity His enemies fell back dismayed in the moment of their utmost and victorious violence. There was the serenity and authority of heaven there—a something sad and noble—to pierce and trouble the hearts of men. We picture Him as He stands up upon that

memorable morn, full of a mysterious power, throbbing with a sense of a divine anointing to a great work :

Dilated nostril, full of youth,
And forehead royal with the truth,

When He spoke, the neighbours forgot that He was the village carpenter. He impressed them with a sense of dignity nobler than anything they knew. He was theirs, and not theirs. A divine remoteness, a strange aloofness, characterised Him. He had ceased to be the Son of Nazareth and had become the Son of Man. A divine transfiguration had already passed over Him. Just as in the spring-time a change passes over the earth, and from within itself the world puts out its grass blades and its flowers, and covers itself with a vesture of new and living beauty, even so the soul of Jesus had been liberated, and had clothed the body with a sort of unearthly power and splendour. What was the secret of that power? How had the change been wrought which had transformed the carpenter into the Prophet, the artisan into the Teacher of the ages? It is a change which we may all share, and it is a change which those must experience who aspire to teach and lead the world Godward. It is the solitary secret of every great ministry and of every divinely-lived human life. Jesus teaches us the secret when He says, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me."

But, again, we may ask, What was it that had supplied the last element in the education of Jesus

to His life work? It was temptation—temptation victoriously resisted. He returned in the power of the Spirit, He returned from prolonged and victorious contest with evil. That is just the element of education which so many ministries conspicuously lack. Ministers know books, and they know creeds, and they know the intellectual processes of religious enlightenment; but too often they do not know men, and they do not know the devil. They have never been brought face to face with the naked evil of the world; they have never looked into the eyes of the tempter, and heard the siren-music of that song that draws men down to death. Their virtue is hot-house virtue, an exotic, sheltered from the testing of the keen blast and the changing weather. Their views of men and things are taken at second and third hand, and are shallow with the unconsidered egotism and incompetence of ignorance; and because they have not been tempted they never accurately measure the fibre of human nature, its capacity for sin and its capacity for victorious resistance. They talk of sin as landsmen talk of tornadoes which sweep over tropic seas in immitigable ruin, using fine and empty phrases where a seaman would use living words, vivid with the realism of suffering. How can he who has never seen the burning bolts of ruin, hurled crashing over sea and land, tell us what the terror of the storm is like? How can he who has never felt the awful presence of evil like a throttling hand, pushing him down and down in grim death-wrestle, tell us what it is to be tempted?

He who is to train men to defeat the devil must himself know what fighting the adversary of souls really means. It is from the tempted men who have overcome temptation that there stream out the life-giving forces which nerve others to overcome evil. It is they who are the true prophets and leaders of humanity. When such men speak we recognise the tone, the accent of infinite suffering and sympathy and conquest, that vibrates in the message. Men know their helper has come. A carpenter he may be, without letters or scholarship, wearing the simple raiment of the toiler, and speaking in his homely idiom ; but the hearts of learned and unlearned alike go out to him as to a great human-hearted brother who has trodden the way of pain and has won the serene heights of holiness. It is worth all the learning of books, a thousand times told, to know the heart of man, and the force of any ministry will be in exact proportion to the real knowledge of temptation which it possesses. If you would be a minister, the door of the true training college is always open to you : it is the desert, it is the devil !

Note, again, how the universal begins with the local. "He came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up." How easy, how far easier indeed, it would have been to have gone anywhere rather than there ! How difficult to begin just there ; yet that is just where all true ministries ought to begin. Who have such a claim upon us as the playmates of our youth, the brothers of the household, the kinsfolk, and the neighbours of our family ? And why is it

that men decline to begin at Nazareth? It is usually through pride and egoism; and ministries which commence in pride end in perdition. "Oh," men say, "if we could but go where no one knew us, to a fresh country or a fresh continent, where no one whispers, 'Is not this a carpenter's son?' when we enter the synagogue; where no one remembers against us the blemishes of youth and the humilities of birth; then we could stand in our natural rights, and men would judge us without prejudice at our proper worth." "Oh," says the youth, "if I could reserve my real convictions for convenient occasions, if my piety might be limited to the arena of the church, and concealed in the office; if you would only grant me that it is right to limit the expression of my piety to times and seasons where jealous or scornful eyes of relatives and friends are not fixed upon me in doubting curiosity—then I could be a Christian." But it is just because neighbours and friends are your worst audience that you must begin there. If you want to reach the universal, you must begin with the local. If you want to move Jerusalem, you must begin at Nazareth. If you are not a minister now, in the humblest surroundings of the humblest life, you will never be a minister in the larger world which lies outside the Nazareth of contumely and scorn. Ministers who cannot preach except to crowds, and who sedulously shun the village of their birth, and conceal the humilities of their youth, are no ministers of Christ. It is the honest instinct of a noble

soul which leads Jesus back to Nazareth, that there, in the presence of those who have known Him from His birth, He may strike the first note of that divine teaching which is to change the ages.

When Jesus opens His lips upon this Sabbath morning it is to announce a revolution—it is to utter the words at whose mystic signal the world, like an enchanted sleeper, is to awaken and a new age is to dawn. But you will notice that the revolution began with reverence. He takes the book of Esaias, and He finds therein the clarion note that is to pierce the dull ears of the world and to startle men into vitality and hope. For, if you consider it, all true revolutions begin in reverence. A true revolution is but a return to primitive principles. It is only when men have departed from primitive principles and vital truths, as the priests had in Christ's day; when they set the formalities of the law above truth and mercy, as the aristocracy of France had a hundred years ago, when they told the famished multitude to eat grass if they were hungry,—as the rich and luxurious classes of to-day are doing when they allow mercantile avarice to increase without restraint, and forget the degradation of the worker in the dimensions of the dividend; it is only then that the note of revolution begins to be heard. When the cycle of sin and darkness completes itself, then the new light arises. When the night is darkest, then the voice that proclaims the dawn is heard.

And it is no wandering voice—it is no incoherent cry; it is the voice of "truth and soberness,"

recalling men to forgotten truths and vital principles. Such a revolution springs always out of reverence—reverence for God and for the truth of God, reverence for man and for the rights of man. Its stream wells up out of some fount of essential sacredness, however it may become defiled as it flows through human society, and it is in Esaias Christ finds the proclamation of that spiritual revolution which He is to complete, just as the old Puritans also found the impulse and authority of their victorious revolution in the Hebrew prophets. And any true moral revolution, I say, must spring from the re-discovery of religion. There never has been, and there never will be, any true revolution that does not spring from sacred sources. Wild spasms of despair, sudden outbursts of demoniacal passion and violence, passing through the nations with a whirlwind of blood and fury, there have been and there will be; but the true revolutions that do not lie down in despair, and do not sob themselves into sullen slumber, spring from a higher source, and are animated by a diviner fire. They are the effort of heroic souls to reproduce the lost Paradise, to recapture the glory of an undefiled and blessed world; they are a return to the simplicities of virtue, and on the banner of such revolutions the sacred words of the prophets are discerned, and in the breasts of their soldiers the holy flame of the martyrs is alive. It is in Esaias Christ finds the programme of the revolution that changes the world.

And now let us ask what is the revolution which began upon that quiet Sabbath morning in the

synagogue at Nazareth? There stands this strange young figure, this gracious youth whose face glows with hope, whose glance has a pathos and a majesty that move all hearts. We hear the eager whisper pass round, we catch the contagious enthusiasm. We can understand as we look upon Him how easy it was that people should desire to make Him a king, and how easy it would have been for Him to allow an excited multitude to crown Him dictator. He has just announced His kingdom, has laid the first stone of an imperishable edifice, and centuries have passed, and the last is not yet laid. What is the meaning of this great proclamation, in which Christ describes the fourfold programme of Christianity?

First of all, He proclaims a Social Gospel, a Gospel that deals with circumstances, a Gospel that deals with the outside conditions of a man's life. He says that He preaches the Gospel to the poor, and that Christianity is hope to poverty: this is the first note that Christ sounds. Now, there can be no mistake whatever as to what poverty means in the common judgment of the world. Poverty is degradation and dependence: to be poor is to be at the mercy of the world. It is to see others crowd the banquet of life while you eat the crusts. It is to know weariness and hunger; it is to rise early and to toil late; it is to have few pleasures and many sorrows; it is to be forced into a narrow environment where half the faculties of life have no room for outlet or accomplishment. To be poor is more or less

to suffer from the contempt of the world—absolutely so in Christ's day, largely so in our own. To be poor is to wear coarse raiment and to do coarse work, and the soiled raiment becomes in the eyes of the world the badge of slavery, the outward symbol of the cross that lies heavy on the soul. To be poor is to suffer pain for which wealth has remedies, and loss for which wealth has consolations. To be poor in its lowest state is to be a social outcast, is to be the Lazarus who lies at the gate, the pariah and helot of civilisation ; to have a lair, not a home ; to be a man put to the drudgery of a beast. That is the human view of poverty, and the vast majority of mankind is poor. Hence the insatiable thirst for wealth which possesses the human race.

What has Christ to say to all that? In what way does He preach the Gospel to the poor? In this way—that Christianity utterly rejects this human view of poverty. Christianity affirms that poverty is not degradation, is not slavery, and is not necessarily the limitation of soul or intellect. Why, the central figure of worship and of infinite love in Christianity is a poor man who had “no place to lay His head,” and whose solitary possession was a seamless robe for which men gambled at His death. It may be doubted whether Jesus Christ ever handled any money at all after He left Nazareth. The soldiers gambled for His garment at the cross, but there was no money to divide amongst them. And to the rich man's contempt for poverty Christianity replies that riches are not happiness, and that Lazarus may be far happier

than Dives. To the rich man's pride of possession it opposes this figure of the Christ—Himself poor, homeless, outcast, yet the Master of the world and the Maker of the universe.

And it is a Gospel to the poor, again, because it arches over every poor man the illimitable firmament, and opens to him the doors of an everlasting life. It teaches him that a soul can thrive in the lowliest of human conditions, and that poverty itself may be the shining ladder of discipline by which he may scale the heavens. It asserts his dignity as a child of God, and bids him cherish it and be true to it.

And, yet further, Christianity is a Gospel to the poor, because Christianity alone has taught us to have some respect for the rights of labour, some sympathy with the sorrows of poverty, some regard for the natural claims of human brotherhood. While political economists treat the poor man only as a cipher in a great sum, and scientists treat him only as a useful drudge ground down in the battle of the survival of the fittest, and statesmen treat him mainly as a troublesome factor in a great problem, to be alternately scorned and feared as supineness may make him impotent or combination may make him powerful, Christianity only has a Gospel for him and an unfailing Gospel. It treats him as a son of God, it treats him as a child of eternity and the heir of immortal life; it bids him learn the perennial dignity of honest labour by the example of the Christ, and when his cry comes up

to heaven it opens before him three visions : the vision of the eternal God Himself, who is the Husband of the widow and Father of the fatherless ; the vision of the Christ sitting at the right hand of God, who wore a poor man's raiment, and lay upon a poor man's bed ; and the vision of an eternal world, where all earthly loss finds divine compensation, and Lazarus is comforted while Dives is tormented. That is the first element of the programme which Christ unfolds.

The second element of this programme of Christianity is the healing Gospel. He claims that He heals the broken-heartedness of the world. What does that mean ? Broken-heartedness, I take it, may stand for the sorrows of love, for the poignant anguish of love unrequited or shattered, the love that seeks but never finds, the love which finds but soon loses, the love which wins an imperfect or no earthly consummation. Poverty is common, but it can be evaded ; broken-heartedness, who can escape ? It is the heritage of no class, the special badge of no section of society. It wails in the palace and in the cottage ; it wrings its bitter tears from the eyes of queens and of peasants alike. Broken-heartedness is the shadow of human love.

Christ begins by touching the lightest form of human misfortune, the disabilities of circumstance. Then He comes nearer, and begins to speak about the heart and to the heart, and of all the infinite sorrows which come upon us through our emotions, and which are the thorny crown of our love, and He says that

He has a Gospel to heal the broken-hearted. How shall that supreme ministration be accomplished? And again the reply is by opening over every human life the vision of an endless life—a life whose one abiding characteristic is love. Christ teaches that whatever else fails, love remains; whatever else is forgotten about you at the Judgment-day, anything that has the spirit of love in it, even the giving of the cup of water to a little one, will be remembered.

Poor, indeed, would that religion be which took no count of human hearts, with their inarticulate yearnings and alienable griefs; but that is precisely what neither philosopher, nor scientist, statesman, nor political economist has any care for. The heart has no place in the cold epitome of abstract philosophical principles, nor in the materialism of science, nor in the ambitious schemes of human government. It is vain we look there for any healing in the hour when the frail supports of life are loosened, and we weep above the silent faces of the dead. Into that dark chamber of calamity philosophy only comes to chill us with its stoicism or plague us with its doubts; there science can only tell us of extinguished life and deride us with talk of the survival of the fittest; and there, also, the statesman has no place, for the fall of empires ceases to interest us when we watch the last breath of the dying and listen for the whispered sad “Farewell!” But into that awful chamber Christ enters fearlessly and says: “Weep not: she is not dead, but sleepeth.” He says: “I am the resurrection

and the life ; whosoever believeth in me shall never die." He says love is immortal, the one thing that knows neither change of state nor place. And thus He heals the broken-hearted. He who is the "Man of Sorrows" carries in His hand the cure for sorrows. He who is "acquainted with grief" heals our griefs and teaches us to remember that these things are the chastening of the Father, who would make us "perfect through suffering." This is the second element of the Gospel programme, to touch the heart and to heal its immedicable wound.

Has Christ anything to say to the intellect ? Does Christianity include that in its programme ? Yes, for the third element in the programme that Christ announced is an emancipating Gospel : "deliverance to the captive and the setting at liberty that which is bound." Christ brings intellectual emancipation. He says : "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Those who think that liberty lies outside Christianity have wholly mistaken the nature of liberty. The true liberty is within Christianity, not without, for Christianity replaces doubt by certitude, the guesses of hope with the never-failing light of faith. Let those who would measure the vastness of this claim, and see its vast fulfilment, cast their eyes over the whole range of history, and behold how true it is that Christianity has liberated the intellect of man. Let them compare the foul dreams of ancient mythology with the holy ideals of the Christian faith, the guesses of the old world with the creeds of the new,

the twilight of the gods with the “day-spring” that has risen upon us “from on high” with the coming of the Son of Man. Let them mark the course of art, of science, of literature, the infinite broadening of human thought, the splendid scrutinies of human research, the new ideals of chivalry, and virtue, and honour, that have filled the world; and if they be candid critics and open-minded students of history, they will acknowledge that it all began in the little synagogue where Jesus stood up and said: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me to preach liberty to the captive.”

This is not the special pleading of the clerical dogmatist; it is the verdict of history. It is not the fanatical boast of the priest; it is the testimony of the ages. It was Christianity that unquestionably sowed, under the foul corruption of the old Roman Empire, the seed that sprang up in a new world. Heine was scarcely a Christian apologist, and yet, scorner and bitter wit and satirist as he was, it is Heine who says, in one of the finest of his passages, how he has a vision of the old gods all seated at their evil feast, when suddenly there enters a pale Jew, with drops of blood upon his brow, and a heavy cross upon his shoulder, and a crown of thorns upon his head, and he flings the cross down upon the table of the gods, and the golden cups vanish and the gods begin to fade into thin air, till, behold, they have passed away! That is the literal history of the work of Christianity, and what Christianity did then it does to-day. It is the Gospel of emancipation.

And then, once more, as the final element, Christ announced an enlightening Gospel. The circumstances, the heart, the intellect, and finally the spirit. Christianity is the recovery of spiritual faculty—sight to the blind, for men were not created blind, but seeing; and Christ gives back the lost power of vision. When a man becomes a Christian, for the first time in his life he knows how to measure life rightly, how to appraise it at its proper value. There can be no greater enemy to a noble life than hesitation, incertitude, vacillation. A man who has not the clue to life is like a man who possesses some stringed instrument of priceless value, but he has no bow wherewith to play it. There is the instrument, and the soul of music hides in its dark recesses, and yearns to be liberated, but he can only fumble at the strings and produce idle, fitful sounds, because the true power to draw harmony out of the instrument is not his. Put the bow in his hands, teach him to use it, and then hear how clear and full the note rings out, how the long, melodious vibrations seem to sweep outward and upward with an air of triumph, as though ecstatic at their release. What a contrast to the halting, muted notes that the clumsy finger made! So when we get to know what life means, when Christ interprets it for us, the full music of the soul is liberated. Christ teaches us the dignity of life and the use of life, and assures us of the life that lies beyond. We are bold to lose our life then, because we learn that losing may be saving; and we can die for the truth then, because

we know that truth never dies, and all the eternities are hers and ours. It is an enlightening Gospel ; the soul recovers its vision, and we see the will of God upon the scroll of destiny, and are at peace.

And who can close the book without feeling, too, how there throbs through this passage a divine hospitality and compassion ! This is the keynote, surely, of Christianity, and must be the keynote of every successful ministry. I recall how one year I travelled to the Hospice of St. Bernard. It was towards nightfall. I was climbing up over the snow in that great solitude. But at last I saw an iron cross upon a crag of rock, lifting itself over the desolate waste, and by that sign I knew that the Hospice was near. And I knew, too, that that cross meant for me warmth, shelter, compassion, hospitality. So when we see the cross we know that shelter is at hand, for Christianity is the hospitality of God. Oh, measure, if you can, the infinite hospitality of these words, the width of their embracing love, the depth of their unspeakable compassion : "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me to preach the Gospel," a social Gospel, a Gospel for the broken-hearted, a healing Gospel, an emancipating Gospel ; the programme of God's goodwill to man, and the declaration of the infinite hospitality of the divine heart.

Here, then, begins all that we understand by the ministry of Jesus. It describes accurately and absolutely all that any ministry in this world can be or accomplish. The minister is he who serves humanity and proclaims the "acceptable year of the

Lord." There is no trace of sacerdotalism or priest-craft here; it is all luminously simple, luminously intelligible. A gracious youth, a man purified and ennobled by temptation, a teacher conscious of the presence and power of the Spirit of God upon Him—He stands up amidst this little group upon this Sabbath morning, and announces His divine message. There is no anointing but that gracious anointing of power from on high; there is no ordination but the authority of character which separates Him from His hearers, and even that gulf of necessary separation is bridged by the force of an overmastering sympathy. It is intense sympathy which is still the keynote of any true ministry. This special gift of adaptation, or that grace of temper, or some other embellishment of thought or scholarship, may be lacking in the preacher; but if sympathy is lacking everything is lacking. Do you remember how Mr. Myers in his noble poem interprets the spirit of St. Paul?—

Oft when the Word is on me to deliver,
Open the heavens, and the Lord is there;
Desert or throng, the city or the river,
Melt in a lucid paradise of air.

Only like souls I see the folk thereunder,
Bound who should conquer, slaves who should be
kings,
Hearing their one hope with an empty wonder,
Sadly contented in a show of things.

Then, with a rush the intolerable craving
Shivers throughout me like a trumpet-call:
O, to save these, to perish for their saving,
Die for their life, be offered for them all!

In those memorable lines is the philosophy of all true preaching. No one has ever truly preached who has not experienced them: the burden of the Word, the vision of men and women as souls, the rush of sacrificial craving to perish for the saving of the world. Homiletic essays demand no such passion. Preaching does.

And now let me ask: Does not the world need ^{1.3} such a Gospel as this, and are we prepared to receive it?

Does not London need a social Gospel? Are there not problems pressing on us for solution, problems which must be solved by the Spirit of Jesus, or else by the unleashed passions of the pit, which know no road but slaughter, and whose only goal is anarchy? And is there one of us who does not need the healing Gospel, the emancipating and enlightening Gospel? The world is tired of Churches, but it wants Christ. The world is sick of ecclesiasticism, but it welcomes truth. The world mocks at priests, but it never fails to recognise the true minister. Are you ready to break with any form of tradition, with any species of predilection or prejudice, if Christ may be the better served, and if His Gospel may be made a truer thing to this great city of infinite toil and sorrow that lies round about us?

For, remember, the main point of all this message is that it proclaims a great opportunity, something that has come, something that will pass away, something that may be seized, something that

may be rejected—"the acceptable year of the Lord." And it is that which gives such solemn emphasis to the act of preaching. Few know the burdens of the ministry, the fierce battle of temptation which has to be passed through before the speaker can speak the words which touch you, the constant sense of failure, the frequent hours of darkness and discouragement, when those to whom you pour out all the treasure of your life whisper disparagement or fail to sympathise with the speaker and his message. Already Calvary had entered into the life of Christ, as Calvary in some form overshadows every true ministry. But the one consolation of the true minister will always be that he has the anointing of God for his work, and his one sorrow will be that he has not more of that anointing. He has to proclaim the truth as it is in Jesus, often feebly, always imperfectly, but never, if he be a true minister, insincerely. He does the work, not from any caprice or pride of human choice, but because God has put him to it, and because he cannot escape it. No man ought to be a minister who can be anything else, it has been said: for it is only the sense of an imperative duty that can justify any man in attempting a task so difficult, so onerous, so burdened with immeasurable responsibility. Let, then, all voice of disparagement, of dispraise, or of distrust for ever cease. Let us be quick not to mark the defects of the preacher, but to catch the true message of God which vibrates in his speech. For Calvary is not far distant, that

dark dying day which we all must face, when the flock will be scattered indeed before the tragic presence of death. Let it be ours to live in charity and to love the truth, that in that hour the truth may be our succour, and that we may know in the ending of our life that, though we may not have seen the fulness of the kingdom of God upon the earth, we have lived for it, we have striven for it, and we have sacrificed for it, and are its true and loyal children.

THE BEGINNING OF THE DOCTRINE

"Is not the life more than meat?"—MATTHEW vi. 25.

THE BEGINNING OF THE DOCTRINE A.B.

WE have already seen that Christ came to preach a life rather than a truth, and in the last effect to found a society of men and women living such a life as He lived. We need also to remember that man alone can be the real saviour of man. Redemption is not magical, but reasonable, and redemption is the reasonable act of a reasonable God. Now, we commonly act and think as though God's method of helping man were by benevolent necromancy. We say Christ came to found a kingdom: where is it? If Christ were the Son of the Highest, why did He not speak the word and it were done? If this kingdom is a reality, how is it that we do not see it? And, going a little further, we are apt to put the facts of life as we know them against the ideals of life as Christ sketched them, and to say that Christ's picture of a possible society of universal goodness and virtue is nothing more than the fine dream of a fantastic visionary. There have been many such dreams, and one by one they have faded like the gold of sunset, and the cold night has settled down over the world again. Golden ages have again and again been announced, but they

have never come. Prophet after prophet has gone down into his grave, weary, disappointed, bitter, disillusionised—saying, as Roger Bacon said, “Men are not worth the trouble I have taken over them.” Was Christ’s picture of society also the baseless fabric of a vision? Is this but another of the creations of a fantastic idealism which has at once charmed and deceived the world?

At first sight even the most hopeful is almost ready to answer, Yes. We have none of us seen such a society as Christ pictured. We do not know the man who, being asked for his cloak, gives his coat also, and being compelled to go one mile, goes twain. We have not ourselves been able to live without thought for the morrow, and we know no one who has accomplished that perilous feat. We see, on the contrary, a world full of men laying siege in every form to one another; rising by others’ misfortunes, and even calculating and creating their successes out of the disasters of others: a world in which common justice is sadly uncommon, and genuine beneficence, which gives by its own sacrifice, the rarest of all actions; where, in fact, for one man who lives in the sense of the unseen, ten thousand live only for food and raiment and visible success. We know, moreover, that where men have made an honest attempt to found communes on the ideal of Christ, such communes have usually failed, and while we are able to recognise the loveliness of Christ’s ideal, we are wholly unable to grant its practicability. Thus it happens, then, that most of us treat the sixth

chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel as an idyll which is pleasant to read, as an idyll of Tennyson might be, but which has no practical relation to common life; and when some enthusiast dares to suggest that Christ meant these sayings to be an available guide for conduct, a bishop is quick to tell us that it is impossible for society to be administered according to the Sermon on the Mount: and probably, if the multitudes of those who denounced him searched their own hearts, they would find that their ideals of conduct practically agreed with his.

What, then, is the explanation of this contradictory state of thought? It is that Christ only spoke of His ideal as practicable upon the fulfilment of certain conditions, and it is the conditions which we have forgotten. We have no more right to expect the kingdom without the conditions, than the dawn without the sun. The one great qualification for a place in the republic of Christ is, that we seek righteousness as the supreme thing, that we value mercy at a higher rate than power, that we rank goodness above what the world calls greatness. Show me a dozen men who truly correspond to this description, and the ideal of Christ would instantly be realised. Reckoning mercy above gain, they would rather do a mistaken charity to a beggar than none at all; caring for the soul and the character more than for the pride of life, they would at once attain that fine simplicity of mind for which the world has no lure. Being conscious, as Christ was, that they came out from God, and returned to Him,

they would live ever in the abiding sense of God's nearness, and would despise the luxuries of life because they were fed with a bread that the world knoweth not of. Show me a society organised on this basis, and you show me a society such as Christ pictured. A commune of such men could not fail. Communes have always failed by an outbreak of human selfishness, and these men would not be selfish. But why, indeed, argue the matter further when we know and admit that this ideal life was the actual life of Jesus, and that there is nothing He commands us to do which He Himself has not done? Christ Himself is the object lesson of the Sermon on the Mount, and behind His words is the undeniable witness of His life and the overwhelming force of His example.

The life is more than meat, and the body than raiment—that is the keynote of Christ's doctrine, and the saying involves two great truths. The first is respect for life; the second, faith in the Creator of all life. Life is not an accidental inheritance, but a solemn trust committed to us. We are emanations of the unseen Deity. We are incarnations of God as truly as of man. If we believe this, the Sermon on the Mount at once becomes intelligible, and it is only intelligible as we do believe it. It is conceivable that the very hairs of our head are all numbered if we are indeed the incarnations of the God who cares for us. It is possible for us to live the undivided life of the soul if we believe that we are part of that Eternal

Soul which made the universe, and lives and moves behind it.

It is natural that we should hold the mere accidental gains of life very lightly when we remember this august alliance with the heavens which is ours. For Christ, as for every other great teacher, the beginning of all noble action in man is faith in God. If there be no God, if we are only emanations of the dust, then the natural duty of each of us would be to live our own life so as to get whatever joy we could out of it; but if we are emanations of God we must needs strive to be perfect as God is perfect, and must feel this torturing but noble passion for flawlessness of soul perpetually possessing us. There, then, all starts and ends; it is goal and horizon, it is Alpha and Omega—this vital belief in God as the responsible Maker of the world, and in ourselves as the emanations of the unseen Deity. Do we believe that? Do we realise that we have come out from God and that we return to Him? Are we conscious of this inward life whose pulse beats in so true a time with the pulse of the Infinite, that we can say, as Tennyson said, that “death is an almost laughable impossibility, and the loss of personality (if it so were) no extinction, but the only true life”? Is it true that for us the life is more than meat?

Now, these truths are ancient and reiterated enough; but if we really believe them they will carry us a long way, and we shall begin to see how Christ’s ideal of society is at once reasonable and

practicable. To the man who does not believe in God the sixth chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel must still remain a noble idyll, a fantastic vision. The world to the blind man is no world ; it is one vast, resounding, hollow darkness. But the least ray of light alters all things, and though he sees men only as trees walking, yet he sees enough to make the world intelligible to him. So the least ray of living faith will make this passage intelligible, but without that living faith in God as the giver of life this passage must remain for ever inscrutable and meaningless. But now let us suppose a man who is thus intensely conscious of God, who feels that the life is more than meat, because he knows his life to be an emanation of God Himself, and let us see what results upon himself and society such a temper would work. This is the best, because it is the most practical, method of measuring what the ideals of Christ are worth. From the effect of these ideals on an individual it is possible for us to ascertain what their effect upon the general mass of society would be, if they were universally accepted and rigorously practised.

The first result would be the simplification of life, and simplification is the great note of all Christ's teaching. In proportion as a man has a keen and vivid sense of the reality of spiritual things he is able to detach himself from the tyranny of carnal things. It is our blindness to spiritual things that makes us the slaves of transient and temporal things. It is because we know no other or higher means of satis-

faction, that we seek such meagre satisfaction as the world can give us. It is because we have no higher outlook, that our ambitions and aspirations find their limit in food and raiment, in the pleasure of the appetite or the apparel, in the praise we extort from each other, or the envy we create in others by successes which they cannot share. We see the working of this narrow temper in every realm of daily life. The man who knows nothing of the joys of the mind can only use his wealth in vulgar display : it is the one tangible result his wealth can afford him. The girl who has no outlook in life beyond the realm of frivolity and pleasure can discover no higher use for her time than the adornment of the person, and naturally finds her one keen interest in the study of what she shall put on. The ever-growing luxury of society is merely the outward witness of the materialism of society ; for as men lose faith in the soul it is inevitable that they should lavish all their thought upon such pleasures as the senses can enjoy.

Christ saw such a society in His day, and He said, "After all these things do the Gentiles seek." He noted luxury as an essential factor of Paganism. He saw all the resources of the Roman civilisation devoted to the task of creating pleasures for the body, and He gives us the true reason for this when He says that it was because Rome had lost faith in the soul. But if you can revive the faith in the soul, then what happens ? If you can make men and women realise that the great end of life is not to make a living but

to live, not to please the body but to discipline the spirit, and thus to win moral excellence, what follows? Then there instantly ensues a simplification of life corresponding to the new elevation of its ideals. Luxury declines and character begins to thrive. Plain living and high thinking become the rule of public life. A new estimate of human worth prevails, and men are praised, not for what they have, but for what they are. That was the great note of simplification which Christ struck, and it has been struck anew by every great teacher; so that now we are at least agreed that the direst foe to national greatness is unrestrained luxury, and the surest minister of national progress is a strenuous and noble simplicity of life. The life is more than meat.

Remember, again, that this is no theory: if one thing is clearer than another in history, it is that a noble simplification of life always follows a general resurgence of faith in God and the unseen. It has been so with all the great teachers. The moment Buddha arrives at the tremendous truth that he is an emanation of God, the material aspects of life perish, and he can gladly forsake a palace to be the brother of the beggar by the roadside. It is in the same way that St. Paul says that he knows how to be abased and how to abound—fulness or poverty are alike nothing to him, because he is lost in the vision of God and eternity. It is so that Wesley speaks, when he tells us how he could dine thankfully on blackberries, and be grateful, after nights of sleep on hard floors, that he is only sore on one side. It was so that

Wordsworth acted : from the moment that the great thought of the mysticism of Nature possessed him, he preferred poverty with the vision of Nature to wealth without it. The men are different ; their ideals and methods of speech are different : but one common spiritual denominator unites all these dissimilar men in a real unity of experience—from the hour the highest things possessed them the spell and seduction of lower things is broken. And as it has been with these special men of the race, so it has been with the great masses of men by no means special ; the influx of a high thought, the reception of a true and living faith, has worked instantly for the simplification of life. It was so with the early Christians. It was so with the Puritans. They were lifted beyond the tyranny of Time and felt themselves already the citizens of eternity. They were not disobedient to the heavenly vision. They lived plainly, and even austere, because their true joys were not the joys of the body. They turned from the feast of life to the vision of God, and shaped all their conduct on the great truth, “The life is more than meat.”

And therefore I say that Christ is profoundly right when He makes faith in God the key to the simplification of life and the reform of society. Men have often said of Christianity : “Yes, it is noble enough in temper and ideal ; but does the spell work ?” In this respect the spell has never failed to work. Up to this point the society Christ sketched has really existed and does exist, wherever this vital faith in

God as the beneficent Father really governs men. If the society we live in bears no resemblance to Christ's society—if indeed it is rather an irony upon it, and can be called Christian only in burlesque, it is simply because society is material, and faith in God is dead. If we believe in ourselves as emanations of God, and are sure of God as we are sure of life, from that moment the simplification of life must follow, and with it a new society, founded on brotherhood, love, and righteousness. The keynote to all lies in the one sentence: "The life is more than meat."

But the words of Christ contain another principle: not merely the simplification of life, but the sacredness of life. Life becomes an unspeakably sacred thing the moment we conceive it to be an emanation of God. We do not possess it; it possesses us. It is something that is not, and never will be, our own. We are but the vehicles of its manifestation, as the glass is the transmitter of the light. Nor is it human life only, but all life, which is sacred. The Buddhist who forbids the destruction of an insect even, only pushes to its utmost limit this great idea of the sacredness of life. And it is at least noticeable that St. Paul, in the plainest manner, binds up in one fate all human and animal life, and says that as the world through all its creatures suffers with man, so the world will rise by and with man, when the age-long travail is complete. For us, it may be, such a thought has little practical significance, but the idea of the sacredness of life is of immense practical importance in its influence on conduct. Who can

submit to base fear and mean anxiety who knows that he has God for his Father? Who can spend all his thought upon appetite and apparel who knows that within him there is a life kindled at the fountain of divine life, a Divinity within that corresponds to and communes with the Divinity above? How can a creature of the stars content himself with searching the mire for bits of earthly tinsel? The life—that sacred, mystic, divine thing which possesses us, and gives to the flesh, that is but as the gathered dust of the road, form, and beauty, and an infinite power of energy—*the life is more than meat.*

And from such a doctrine two results spring. One result touches very nearly a grave and terrible modern problem. The common assumption of man is, that at all events his life is his own. Is it? If it be, then it is quite clear that a man has every right to do what he likes with his own, and it follows that if he chooses to commit suicide, it is simply his own affair, for he acts within his rights. We know that it was thus that the Roman world of Christ's day thought and acted. To go out by the stern old Roman way has become with us an euphemism for suicide. We know that men reason in the same way still, and ever and again some unhappy man leaves behind him the declaration of his right to end his own life. We know that a modern poet of great genius has sung the praise of suicide, and has said:

O brothers of sad lives that are so brief,
A few short years must bring us all relief;
Can we not bear these years of labouring breath?

But if you would not this poor life fulfil,
Lo, you are free to end it when you will,
Without the fear of waking after death.

And we know, once more, that suicide is becoming more common year by year, and that there seems to be some actual law that associates suicide with civilisation. There are hours of frightful overstrain and uttermost misery when even a good man may sigh for death as Job did, and ask why he may not leave a world that no longer needs him? The reply is, Life is sacred: it is not ours; it is God's. We did not create it, and we have no right to end it. We do not possess it—it possesses us; for we are the children and emanations of that Eternal Life we call God.

Victor Hugo has put this truth in noble form and with fine emphasis. He says: "No one has the right to abandon the dwelling God has given him in putting him in this world, and I believe that God makes such a man begin again, under harder conditions, the existence that he has wilfully shattered." And then he goes on to analyse the play of a French dramatist, who pictures a man committing suicide through poverty, and immediately waking in the next world to perceive a letter on the way to himself, announcing a large inheritance, which would have been his if he had but been patient. For such a failure of patience is a failure of faith, and it is by faith alone we can realise the true sacredness of life.

The other result of this truth is that all men become sacred in our eyes because they also are emanations of God. Pity, compassion, and brother-

hood take the place of the Roman contempt of life and callousness to suffering. The bitterness of caste and class prejudice is effectually broken down when we realise that the meanest man or woman is truly an incarnation of the Deity. The fountain of an eternal philanthropy is opened when we recognise that all life is sacred, and know that to do a kindness to the least of these our brethren is to do it unto God Himself. If life is sacred, who dare oppress it with wanton cruelty? If the God we worship really approaches us in our humblest neighbour, how is it possible not to treat the humblest with reverence? And if we love not our brother, whom we have seen, how can we love God, whom we have not seen, since both are one: man the manifestation of God, and God the invisible Father of man?

And now cannot any one see that Christ's ideal of society is possible? Can we not see that if these great principles were not merely granted, but were acted upon, a new world and a golden age would certainly follow? Can we not perceive that they would put an end forever to war, and lust, and murder, and all the inhumanity of man to man, by which the world is cursed? Yes, the kingdom of Christ is possible, is practicable. It is not a fantastic dream, it is a working programme of life. And it is coming—slowly, as the dawn comes, but as surely. I salute that dawn, I hail that kingdom, that new divine society, and call upon myself and you to live for it. Every gain of spiritual vision and moral truth; every growth of compassion, and generous

feeling, and charitable brotherhood ; every wrong righted, every unjust law resisted, every inhumanity redressed, marks the growth and coming of that kingdom ; and it is with both hope and faith, with yearning and certainty, we pray day by day : “ *Thy kingdom come ; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.* ”

THE LESSON OF THE LILY

"Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow."
MATTHEW vi. 28.

THE LESSON OF THE LILY



ONE might know that this was an out-door discourse by the illustrations that pervade it. The wind of the hillside blows through it, the odour of the Spring is in it: the freshness and splendour of a sunny world. Illustrations like these do not come to men who preach within four walls; we miss the infinite suggestions that Nature makes to the quick and vigilant eye, the signals and tokens by which she flashes her truth in an instant on the prepared sense. We who labour over books need constantly to be reminded of the truth that Words-worth teaches :

One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach us more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can.

Jesus Christ was always learning and always teaching this great lesson of Nature. He went into the city to heal, but He loved rather to teach by the mountain or the sea, and to draw the people of the city after Him into that larger temple where neither priest nor altar were needed. The height of Lebanon and Tabor, the calm breadth of shining water by the

shore of Galilee, the endless blue of the serene heavens, suited the catholic humanity of His teaching. They also touched His audience into sensitiveness to His appeals, for it was always in the city He met ridicule and jealous opposition : in the country the common people heard Him gladly. And now, when His aim is to withdraw a multitude of tired and anxious people from thoughts about themselves, to teach them the art of quiet trust, to make them feel that round man's restlessness there flows God's rest, the illustrations are ready to His hand. "Behold the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap nor gather into barns, yet your Heavenly Father feedeth them. Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow."

It may seem somewhat of a mockery to say to a crowd of city people in a church, "Consider the lilies," and to show them how much Nature ought to be to man ; but it by no means follows that, because we do not live where lilies grow, the lily is nothing to us, or that we do not recognise the ministry which Nature can accomplish for the human heart. Some of those who have loved Nature with the deepest passion have dwelt in cities. Much of the poetry that has interpreted Nature with the most glowing imagery has been written by men born and bred in cities. We so far recognise that Nature is something to man that every year there is a vast exodus from the city, and all to whom it is possible seek the mountain and the sea, the eternal serenity of the fields and woods. We so far feel that Nature

has really something to say to us, that there is not a life in all the five million lives of London which would not be gladdened by a glimpse of flowers : not a child in its darkest and most barbarian realm of savagery who does not covet a flower, and is not the better for possessing it. Nor is this a mere sentiment. It is the witness of the human heart to a fact, and that fact is, that God made us when He made the earth, and that He made the brightness and glory of the earth, that it might give a natural joy and brightness to our lives.

This much, then, we may venture to say, that no man can be a good man who is not in sympathy with Nature. The man who is dead to the divine charm of flowering Spring or mellow Autumn, who can look upon the sunrise or sunset without emotion, who sees nothing in the everlasting hills but barriers to be tunnelled, nothing in the miraculous fashioning of flower and fruit but a marketable commodity, is not a good man ; there is something wrong or lacking in him ; he has broken or defiled the mirror of the soul in which God meant the pageant of Nature to be reflected. He has dulled his heart with avarice or cruelty ; he has wasted his powers in folly or iniquity ; he is perverted or debased by some great evil that he has wrought upon himself ; for the man who is out of touch with Nature is also out of touch with God. If it be a true flash of insight which makes Shakespeare declare that the man who has not music in his soul is fit for treacheries, still truer is it that the man for whom Nature means

nothing, witnesses by that very deficiency to some terrible demoralisation which has spoiled and corrupted him.

Think of what Nature was to Christ: how He sought its solitude, and took refuge from the cruelty of man in its healing serenity: how His parables and teachings are drawn from its perennial analogies: how the breath of the fields and the sea and the mountain wanders like a fragrance through all His speech: and you will see that there is a ministry of Nature which is very real and divine, since it did so much for the divine Son of Man. It is not a mere sentiment which makes us love Nature; it is a religion. It is not a rare quality in some few representative men of the race that makes them keenly sensitive to the beauty of the earth; it is a quality bound up in the being of us all. Christ is not addressing a group of botanists, but a weary multitude of average men and women, and His text is, *Consider the lilies.*

What, then, is the intention of Christ in this passage? In the first place, it is clearly to put side by side the lily and the man, and to compare and contrast them. There is the man with anxious eyes and sad heart, worn down by the attrition of the world, wearied with the vicissitudes and vexations of life. There is the lily, immaculate and joyous, free and happy, lifting its white cup that it may be filled with long draughts of sunshine, and in return pouring out upon the air a rich continuous stream of fragrance. And what is there in common between

the lily and the man? These things at least are common: they each have life, one in a high degree, and the other in what we judge a low degree; they both fade and die, for man is cut down as a flower of the field and continueth not in one stay; they both come into the world by a mystery of birth that can never become commonplace however frequently it is repeated. Is there any further analogy to unite them? Is it poetic exaggeration alone that makes comparison between them possible? Christ did not exaggerate: He was not a speaker of airy nothings: no crowd would have followed Him if He had been only a skilled weaver of happy fancies and far-fetched conceits. It would have been a miserable insult to have talked to that crowd of travel-stained and eager people of the lessons of the lily, if there had been no real lesson to be learned. It would be a moral crime for me to waste a single hour of this tragic gift of time which is ours, and which is fraught with such appalling issues, in talking of flowers, if there were no real message for the soul in it all. But there is a message—there is a truth: let us try to perceive the parable and understand the message.

Consider the lily. It is beautiful beyond doubt. Christ says that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these flowers of the field, and this lesson has been again and again enforced upon us by the amazing revelations of the microscope. Among all the costly fabrics woven on the finest looms in the world, which have found a place among

the exhibits yonder at Chicago, there has been nothing a hundredth part as fine in texture as the raiment of the lily. Men will cross three thousand miles of water and a thousand miles of continent to look on the tapestries that man has woven; but a finer fabric, spun upon the looms of God, lies at their own doors. They will crowd to this or that gallery to admire some mere similitude of Nature dexterously wrought out of paint and canvas; but the child who looks into the cup of the lily sees a more marvellous sight than the picture galleries of all the world could show him. The miracle of the flower remains a miracle, so that Tennyson could say that to know what the flower was and how it grew, would mean the conquest of all knowledge—

If I could understand
What you are, root and all, and all in all,
I should know what God and man is.

Consider, then, the miracle of the flower, and the corresponding miracle of man, for of man it is said that he is created in the image of God. Not this man, or that; not a Shakespeare or a Handel; but every man, common as he is and common as he looks. Approach him and study him, and you will find that he is not common: he excites reverence and affection. If the lily of the field be a memorable work of God, how much more is man, and every man! Human culture is a more entrancing science than horticulture; for, says Jesus Christ, is not the man a far vaster wonder, and of immeasurably

higher value, than the flower of the field or the bird of the air ?

Consider the lily, then, and learn the dignity of commonness. We are told by naturalists of a lily which is found in Central Africa, whose cup is measured by feet and not by inches—a veritable splendour which can only be looked upon with amazement ; but this is not the lily that Christ speaks of. It is the lily of the field, the humble flower of the pastures and the woods, which is to be numbered by millions. The most careless of us is apt to be impressed by mere magnitude and rarity. When we see that great vine at Hampton Court which is one of the hackneyed sights of the metropolitan sightseer, and begin to take count of its innumerable clusters ; or that great rose-tree in Holland which has been known to bear six thousand roses in one season ; we make a note in our pocket-books, and cry “ How wonderful it is ! ” And in the same way we pick out some patriot or poet of the race, some author, or statesman, or musician, and we salute his name with astonishment and adulation. It is an easy thing to persuade ourselves that we have a real reverence for man when we select our man, and take care to select only the rare and noble products of the race. But Christ’s reverence for man was not confined to picked specimens of the race, any more than His praise for the lily was based upon the exceptional beauty of some single flower which had touched a marvellous grade of development never known before or since. He

praised the common lily of the field and He reverenced the common man.

Do we? Have we learned the dignity that dwells in commonness? Do we look upon the man or the woman who serves us, and instead of calculating how much labour the human machine can be made to do for us at how low a price, do we begin to think of the divine image that confronts us there? Do we not too often permit ourselves to think with contempt of lowly men and women, just as men think of lowly flowers, and so miss altogether the divine miracle that is visible in the meanest man? And be sure of it, contempt for man, and cynical distrust and indifference towards men because they are lowly and common, is the sin that Christ finds most difficult to forgive. It is the sin that is most wholly hostile to His temper. The greatest poets have found the lowliest flowers fit themes for their most memorable songs, and the true mark of moral greatness is to see the dignity and beauty that are hidden in lowliness. Consider the lilies of the field, then, and remember that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Consider your fellow-man, and perceive that he is created in the image of God. The ground plan of God is there, just as in the briar of the hedge there is the potentiality of the perfect rose; just as in the wildest growth of the vine there is the potency and promise of the vine of Hampton Court. And there will be no real salvation for society in the building up of a juster and better

world, no real coming of the Kingdom of God on earth, till we learn reverence for man as man, and think of him as Christ thought of the lily of the field.

I hear a man yonder in the street playing some old melody upon a mean and rickety instrument: it wheezes and groans, and the tune comes in spasms and distortions, and some one tells me that that tune was written by Handel, and it is called, "See the Conquering Hero comes." I reply, "Well, then, Handel wrote a very bad tune." "No," my friend says, "he did not, but it is played upon a very bad instrument." A month later I go to the Handel Festival, and hear that sound of harping symphonies and sevenfold hallelujahs, which is as the sound of many waters, and piercing and dominating the great chorus is a bar of music that lingers in the mind and claims familiarity. It is my old friend, "See the Conquering Hero comes." "What," I say, "is that the same tune which I heard played upon the street organ?" Yes, but now it is performed as Handel meant it to be heard. So there are many men who perform the music of God upon very poor instruments, but a wise and generous ear will recognise the tune, and will know what God meant it to be. The man who so listens will link the wheezing of the street organ to the triumphal sound that rises from the great choir of the Handel Festival, just as Christ perceived in extremest lowliness, and in commonest life, the elements of possible divinity and glory. Consider the common things of life: they are more

wonderful than anything that Solomon could show you. Consider not the star, but the lily, and know that the hand that orb'd the star also made the lily of the field, and learn that among all God's creatures there is nothing common or unclean. That is the first lesson of the lily of the field.

Consider the lily: it is beautiful when you have learned to see it truly. But whence is the beauty? It is the equal product of the earth and of the heavens. Round its roots is what the children would call "dirt"; what Darwin would tell us is the product of the blind earth-worm; what we at least know to be a rough and crude substance which soils the fingers. But overhead is the sky, with its light, and the blue air, and the soft dews, and the winged winds; and the beauty of the lily is something in which both heaven and earth have a part. The lily needs more than earth—it needs sky; it needs more than sky—it needs earth.

That is a parable homely enough, but it is one not the less that we need to learn. For there are many excellent people who have tried to achieve moral beauty without a sky, without a heavenly outlook. They have said: "The earth is good enough for me; life and love are enough: what do I want with heaven?" And there, again, are people who have tried to achieve moral beauty without an earth beneath them; and they have said: "Heaven is what I aspire to: what need have I of earth?" The first forget that man is of the heaven, heavenly, and cannot thrive without God. The second forget that man

is also of the earth, earthy, and can achieve no beauty unless his root is deep in the red soil of humanity.

I do not suppose there are many of us who are endeavouring to live without a human soil, and are thus lost in mystic yearnings for the heavens. The race that thought that thought is dead—at least in Protestantism. We do not suffer by any unnatural abhorrence of earth, or any ascetic yearnings for the heavens. Heaven is dropping out of the modern Christian's vocabulary, and we think little nowadays of the work of the dew, and the starry silence, and the divine height of the encompassing firmament upon our souls. But there are a great many people who think that they can achieve moral beauty out of the earth alone; they are frankly of the earth, earthy, and ignore the heavens. Consider then the lily, how it grows, for the earth alone never produced that beauty. The dews did it, and the light, and the darkness, and the wind. The immense order of the firmament, with its countless worlds, made the light that made the lily. The seasons, marching at the bidding of an eternal will, made the rain that flushed its root and fed its flower. No, my brother, earth alone cannot make you a perfect man; you must enlist the heavens. There is no beauty without the upward look, no fine achievement of character without the sense of God and patient waiting upon Him; and have we learned that lesson? Have we discovered that prayer and aspiration, divine outlook and desire, are absolutely necessary for the growth

of the soul, because without them the soul never comes to full flower, and the programme which God designed for man stands for ever unfulfilled ?

That is the second lesson of the lily.

Consider the lily yet once more. It grows ; it can grow anywhere. There is no hurry, no paroxysm of speed, no leaps and bounds of intermittent vitality. It simply grows. What a divine restfulness breathes in that saying ! Here are men and women, vexed and urged by every kind of eagerness, trying to outrace one another in this or that pursuit, making dire efforts to push ahead in this or that direction, or to make up for lost time in another. The lily only grows. It puts itself in the right environment, and then leaves time to do the rest. It finds its proper soil, its nook of quiet shelter, and its outlook to the sunlight, and then it grows. O men and women, restless and perturbed with all the anxieties of this life, is not this for each of us the one thing needful ? When we have brought the soul into right relations with God, have we not done all that needs to be done ? And have we done that ? Have we conceived it to be our mission in this world simply to grow ? Not to get on, for growth may cease as goods increase : not to win wealth, for wealth is accumulation, not growth : but simply to grow, to develop the powers of life, and thought, and feeling, that some day Christ may find us as He walks through the world, and say : " Consider this man or this woman, how they have grown, and how the image of the earthly has been slowly

merged and transfigured into the image of the heavenly."

And if you study this passage you will see that this is the master-thought of Christ as He looks upon the lily, and the chief truth that He would make it teach. You toil for raiment, says Christ; the lily toils to live. You want to wear something; the lily to be something. You try to be beautiful by putting something on; the lily develops its beauty from within itself. Look at the little child yonder: what is its chief business in life? It is simply to grow. The child may be the heir to a throne, or the disinherited offspring of the slave, but all through childhood that remains its one great business in the world—to be and to grow. And that really remains the one business of man upon the earth, if he did but know it. What he gets or wears is nothing; what he is, is everything. The question is not what we possess, but what we are. To make a living is not half so great a thing as to live, and there are men who make fortunes, and who die in soul and mind inch by inch for every gain they make. And have we learned that lesson? Have we, who profess the name of Christ in an age when the thirst for wealth was never keener or more widespread, learned this elementary lesson of all Christian ethics, that to be and to grow, to win beauty of character, magnanimity of nature, modesty and grace of spirit, is the one thing worth living for?

Do you remember how it was once said of a good woman by a chivalrous man that it was a liberal

education to have known her? And why? Had she written books? No. Had she led some great movement and been a brilliant figure in society? No. Had she wit, genius, a mind of unusual power and penetration? No. What had she then? She had the grace of perfect purity and goodness; she had made it her business to grow. There are still people in the world of this noble order, and when we meet them we instinctively recognise that they are the finest products of human life. We come out of their presence insensibly strengthened and refreshed. We love goodness better for having known them, and serve truth better for having talked with them. They are not the people to get reported in the newspapers, or have their portraits in society journals. They are the lilies that grow in the common places of life, and make the commonest place uncommon because they are in it. And is it not a great thing to do this? Is it not something we can all do? Yes; we can all fulfil this programme, and can learn that it is the one supreme mission of life for every man to grow, to be, to live. And that is the third lesson of the lily.

The last aspect of the parable is, that to be beautiful is to be perfect, to be perfect is to be beautiful. *Consider the lily*: you reply, "I have considered it, but what does it do? It feeds no one; you cannot make bread of it, you cannot reap it for fodder, you cannot crush it for oil or wine; it is an interloper in the pastures, it is a bandit in the woods. It has no claim upon us save this one poor claim, that it has

comeliness of form and colour, and it brings with it the odour of the summer." Well, and is that nothing? Would you so belittle and bemean the world as to have no care for the things that are lovely? Why, even the dismal ethics of political economy do not carry us quite so far as that. It is an admitted axiom that beauty is the most valuable thing in the world. If you go to Munich you will see there a picture that men travel from the ends of the world to behold. It is by Raphael; it is a mother and her child. It was probably painted in a day and upon the coarsest canvas, for it was only meant for a banner in a church procession. Ten shillings would be too large a price for the canvas on which that immortal face lives, and for the paint and varnish by which its fine similitude of life is fashioned; but a king's ransom could not purchase it, and if it were for sale to-morrow, the Governments of all Europe would compete for its possession. And why? Because it is perfect, and because it is beautiful. That is its value, and it is a value beyond the arithmetic that we learn in schools.

Do not think it, then, a theme that lies outside the pulpit—a fit theme for the artist or the architect, but not for the ambassador of Christ—if I plead for the divine mission of beauty in the world. God has not made a wholly utilitarian world, and He does not expect us to measure all things by utilitarian standards. Beauty, when it is the beauty of purity and grace, has a mission in the world, and few people have ever more grossly misunderstood that mission than we

English people. For many a long century great numbers of us denied all light and brightness to the house of God and the service of God, because we judged that beauty was a power that imperilled rather than purified the soul. We associated duty with ugliness, and beauty with wickedness, forgetful of the noble Hebrew ideal, that beauty as well as strength should dwell in the sanctuary of God. We denied the very flowers an entrance into God's house, although the Psalmist could rejoice that the swallow had made her nest under the altars of the Most High. We did all that we could to diminish the joy of worship, forgetful of the harps and trumpets of the ancient Temple, and the great antiphonies of joyous praise with which Israel came before their Maker. And because we repulsed beauty instead of welcoming it, because we allowed it to be degraded where we should have sanctified it, it has happened inevitably that the new generation, in whom the joy of living is strong, has turned away from the Church. The enormous loss of Protestantism through this wilful contempt of beauty can never be computed, and if there be one thing more than another that to-day calls for emphatic assertion, it is that religion is a thing of joy and beauty, and that God's house is a place into which we may enter with gladness.

What, then, is true beauty? It is the perfect expression and fulfilment of our best selves. It is not without justification that we associate flowers with ideas of purity, and the "beauty of holiness" is a Scripture phrase which admits of no misunderstanding.

Why is the lily beautiful? Because it has fulfilled its end in the world; it has accomplished what God meant it to do, and therefore it stands fair and complete in the rectitude of loveliness. Good is the only beauty, evil is the only ugliness. "*Do it beautifully,*" says the miserable heroine of one of Ibsen's dramas, when she counsels suicide to an equally miserable man—"Do it beautifully." But you cannot do a wrong thing beautifully; you cannot make cowardice, and lying, and selfishness, and lust beautiful. They are forever ugly. It is not without profound truth that every great poet paints evil as hideous and deformed, and good as radiant and lovely. If you would have the beauty of the lily, you must have the rectitude of the lily; you must have its flower-like purity, its serene content, its simple and perfect adjustment to God's environment. Once more, consider the lily, and if the flower is lovely, note that it is because it is what God meant it to be, and because it has never thwarted the purpose of God by that perversity of soul which is the curse of man.

To the harassed and weary this simple flower of the field preaches, as Christ meant it to preach, its own final lesson: it grows, it does what God means it to do, and it is beautiful in doing it. That is all that God demands of us. Our supreme duty is to master the art of living; the rare and difficult art of growing in sweetness, purity, goodness, moral height and stateliness; and for such a life God cares, and cares with tireless beneficence. He who feeds the

raven and spins the raiment of the lily does not forget the soul that seeks first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. The soul that seeks excellence alone as the chief good, character as the one abiding gain, moral beauty as the one enduring possession, will not lack any good thing. O vain and troubled soul! behold this is the way of peace. Trust in the Lord and do right, and all these things that you toil to attain shall be added to you without effort.

Is not the life more than meat? Is not the body more than raiment, O ye of little faith?

CHRIST AND THE FAMILY

"Then one said unto Him, Behold, Thy mother and Thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with Thee. But He answered and said unto him that told Him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren?"
—MATTHEW xii. 47, 48.

CHRIST AND THE FAMILY

WAS it rudeness or indifference that prompted this speech? Was it some strange mania of asceticism, whose growing passion had so swept Jesus out of the range of human affections, that He could thus scorn them and reject them, glorying with the narrow pride of the ascetic in His superiority to those claims which the best men regard as most sacred? His mother—how much had she borne for Him in the evil tongues of Nazareth, the peril and terror of the scenes that surrounded His nativity, the panic-stricken flight into Egypt, the early exile and the lifelong poverty; and now He disowns her. Is this the pattern of obedience He would set? Or rather shall we say, is this the lesson of filial revolt which He would have us copy? Why will He not speak with His mother and His brethren? What is the meaning of this strange episode?

The simple answer is, that this is the first deliberate declaration of that new society which Jesus called the kingdom of God, and He will not speak with His mother and His brethren because they are out of sympathy with its ideals, and are hostile to its spirit. He knew what they would say, for already

He had suffered by their criticism. It is not difficult for us to reconstruct the picture of the youth of Jesus, for we have our materials at hand in daily human life. We read ever and again in some biography, in such a life as Shelley's, for example, of those whose ardent and noble ideals are pitched too high for the world and the society they live in. Their revolt against tradition is early and complete. They refuse to accept the sordid limitations of a life that is cowardly enough to rest contented in conditions which are felt to be wrong. They refuse to march in step with society; they would rather set it moving to a new music. They are possessed with the divine insanity of noble minds. They see a light that never was on sea or land, and they follow it. They must needs live a life that is separate from society and higher than society, or perish in the attempt.

And then what happens? Instantly a man's foes are they of his own household. All the forces of domestic love, respectability, convention, and tradition, are thrust in his way and dispute his progress. The father, who hates poetry or despises art, cannot understand the insane passion of his child which leads him to reject the comfortable awards of commerce, that he may write something which the world will not read, and paint something which the world does not want. The mother, whose vision of the world is limited, and who has learned to value before all other things the good opinion of relatives and neighbours, is hurt, and grieved, and

cruelly wounded, by the strange temper of her child, who wants to live life on a new method, and a method which no one approves. Be false to truth and loyal to love, is the real meaning of the appeal which the parent makes to the child in such a case, and perhaps of all forms of domestic tragedy the most painful is that which arises from the presence of an unconventional child in a conventional home. Think of what it would mean if you should find a Christ in your home to-morrow; if your child should outrage the proprieties of society as Jesus did when He left His workshop and entered the Church only to denounce its ministers, and sought the city only to gather round Him a mob of ignorant and disreputable listeners. What would you say and do? You would say, as the brethren of Christ said, "He is mad"; and if you could arrest him in his perilous career, you would, and would persuade yourself that you did it for love's sake.

Yes; the first nail of Christ's crucifixion was forged and driven home in the house at Nazareth. The first hot breath of that popular anger which slew Him, met Him there, and the saddest repulse of all His life was the repulse He met in the house of His birth, where not even His mother understood Him. They wished to speak with Him—why should He listen? It was too late now to turn back. He had heard all that they could say already, and had heard it many times. From those quiet hills they had now come down to interrupt Him in His work, because they would not believe in

His ideals. They could not grasp the true significance of His conduct, and even while they pushed their way in the throng to reach Him, they probably whispered to the crowd, "He is beside Himself."

This, then, is the setting of the picture, and its natural explanation. Let us own it honestly, to find a Christ among our children would prove a cruel and eminently inconvenient surprise. We are so sunk in cowardly respect for tradition that we should act no better towards our Christ than Mary did. There are homes at this hour inhabited by strictly good and moral people, who call themselves Christians, where the great domestic trouble forsooth is that the son has joined the Salvation Army, or that the daughter insists on being a nurse, or a Sister of the Poor, or a missionary to the heathen, and the parents have not been able to dissuade them. We are often hard upon sin, but we are harder still on that moral enthusiasm which makes a man singular, and in general society the sensualist is far more readily tolerated than the idealist. We have yet to learn that the idealist alone is fitted to be the saviour of the world, and that he who loves not truth more than father and mother, is not worthy to be the disciple of that Divine Idealist whom we call Jesus.

There are, then, four practical truths which Christ teaches in this incident, and the first is a doctrine of higher relationships.

It is beyond doubt true that we are born into certain relationships which we should respect, and

which it is our plainest duty to maintain. The relation between child and parent is so sacred that we recognise in it the chief foundation of the order of society. But is it not also true that we are born into yet higher relationships which are even more sacred and imperative? "Vows were made for me," said Wordsworth, and what was it that he meant? He meant that in his own nature there were imperative affinities which had for him the weight and sanction of a divine call and ordination. His own powers, the nature of his own soul, the fixed tendency of his own thoughts, constituted a force which he dared not resist, for we are not only the children of our own parents, but the children of the race. It is not our parents' life alone that throbs in us, but the stream of that universal life of which we are the momentary incarnations. We owe our powers, not alone to those who gave us birth, but to ancestors far back in a mysterious past, who have transmitted to us the unfulfilled programme of their ended lives. Renan defined religion as the romance of the infinite, and that romance of the infinite is felt by every soul, and that most real relation of the soul to the infinite is most keenly realised by the noblest spirits of the race. It would be after all a poor and mean world if our only duty were to those who happen to be our parents; our duty is a far wider and higher matter than can be included in such limitations, and as a mere matter of fact we do not obey any such limitations. The moment we have the strength to do so, we take up other relationships—to our neigh-

bours, to the State, to the world itself ; and if we did not, human progress would be impossible.

One form, an extreme form, of this doctrine of higher relationships we see in the long history of monastic orders. It is too late in the day to defend monasticism. I am not prepared to approve monasticism or to apologise for its follies, but may I not reasonably ask, Was there nothing noble in its noblest forms ? Is there nothing in the austere purity of a St. Dominic, the self-renouncing charity of a St. Francis Assisi, the high and separated life of a Thomas à Kempis, which we can recognise as admirable ? For, let it be remembered, there was a pure as well as a corrupt monasticism ; a great and noble theory of celibacy as well as a sensual and degraded travesty of it. In its earliest and best forms, monasticism was a system which aimed at expressing this doctrine of a higher relationship. Men chose celibacy for the kingdom of God's sake. They voluntarily withdrew themselves into a calm and passionless realm, where they neither married nor were given in marriage, because they believed and proved that by such an act they could best serve the Church in perilous and difficult days. They renounced the personal relationships of the home, that they might enter on a wider relationship with humanity, and find their sisters and brethren in all who did the will of God. And I am not sure that much of the work that needs doing to-day for the Church can be done so well in any other way. Some men and some women there must be, who are willing to forego

what the heart most covets, if the desperate work of laying the foundations of the kingdom of God in the realms least visited by hope is to be done. The apostle who is to traverse land and sea in missionary journeys, who is to be in perils oft of the heathen and his own countrymen, who is to do what the Jesuit missionaries to the Indians did, who is to live in the spirit and the fashion of a Loyola, a Xavier, a Mackay of Uganda, must needs be content with the larger human relationships he creates, and must be willing to renounce the personal. If our imagination were as powerfully possessed with the sense of God and eternity as was the mind of the Middle Ages, we should not need to be told this truth. It is because we live in an age of unbounded materialism that the strength to believe in such ideals has left us, and we are content to denounce monasticism with undiscerning contempt, and are unable to perceive the soul of truth that throbbed beneath all its errors. Home is a sacred institution, Christ seems to say ; but the kingdom of God is more than home. The cultivation of private and personal affections is a noble joy, but we do not reach the highest realm of the affections when we love only those who love us :

Renounce joy for my fellows' sake ? That's joy
Beyond joy.

Who are our brethren and sisters ? Christ answers, Humanity ; and if it be necessary to break all ties of personal association that we may reach the

most brutal and least lovable of humanity, let the sacrifice be made ; for he that loves father, or mother, or sister, or brother, more than me, is not worthy of me.

There is a lovely poem by a modern poet (Mrs. Meynell) in which this truth is put from a yet higher standpoint. San Lorenzo has entered the cloister, and his mother has not seen his face since those days of early youth when he left her. One day, one of his Order stands before her door, and she says :

Mine eyes were veiled by mists of tears,
When on a day in many years
One of his Order came. I thrilled,
Facing, I thought, that face fulfilled ;
I doubted, for my mists of tears.

The mother gives him alms, and then loses his echoing feet for ever. But as she thinks and is sad, the nobler thought comes, that her son has entered on a larger sonship now, and she upon a higher motherhood :

If to my son my alms were given,
I know not, and I wait for Heaven.

* * * * *

There is One alone who cannot change :
Dreams are we, shadows, visions strange :
And all I give is given to One.
I might mistake my dearest son,
But never the Son who cannot change.

Yes, for now her son is brother to the Son of Man, and her motherhood now includes in its affection all who share his labour, all who wear the dress of his

Order and live his life. What, is this lonely, simple woman to be accounted as mother to the Christ? Even so, replies the divine voice: she has given me her son out of a sorrowing heart, that the world may be helped, and whoso doeth the will of the Father in heaven, the same is my mother.

But whatever view we may take of the practical application of this doctrine of higher relationships, one thing at least is clear, that there can be no true personal love where this more catholic love does not exist. The man who loves only the members of his own household will not love them well. No deep and tender love can ever come out of a narrow heart. Such a heart will love narrowly, exactingly, and jealously. Who would not rather trust for love the man or woman known for their compassion to the poor, their generosity to the friendless, their service of the disinherited, than the man of parsimonious and unsympathetic life, however intense his power of personal passion? Who does not instinctively feel that the man who is selfish in his general temper will be selfish in his love, and that he who acknowledges no duties to society is not likely to fulfil in any high and true fashion his duties to his home? The fact is, that the narrower we make our love the weaker we make it. The secret of much unhappy love in this world—love that is unhappy by its jealousies and exactions—is that it has narrowed itself without intensifying itself. Seek your brothers and sisters in humanity, cultivate a large and generous love for

the race, and your personal affections will be at once stronger and purer. Christ did not cease to love His mother because He had learned to love the race. He could not indeed give up His love for the world at her bidding; but He who loved the world well enough to die for it, loved His mother also with a nobler passion than even she could conceive, and almost His last word upon the cross was a thought for her, when He said to John, "Behold thy mother," and to her, "Behold thy son."

But, again, Christ teaches also a doctrine of higher allegiance. Allegiance to what? Allegiance to the truth: fidelity to the ideal.

In one of Olive Schreiner's strangely beautiful "Dreams" there is the dream of a mother who ponders the future of her child. She dreams that the bees that were flying about her head as she fell asleep are suddenly changed to winged human creatures, and one by one they approach her with promises for her child. One says: "I am Health, and if I touch the child he will never know weariness or pain." Another says: "I am Wealth, and if I touch the child he will never know poverty and want." Another says: "I am Fame, and if I touch the child his name will not be forgotten through the ages." Another says: "I am Love, and if I touch the child, in the greatest dark, when he puts out his hand he shall find another hand near." But last of all comes one with deep-lined face and hollow cheeks, who can promise neither health, nor wealth, nor fame, nor love, but only the lack of them. Yet there is one thing which this last strange

visitor can promise—it is, that the child shall ever follow truth, and yearn for the ideal which no one else covets, and follow it and be true to it; and for what reward? “This is the reward,” replies the solemn voice: “the ideal shall be real to him.” And then the mother, being wise for her child, says to this strange guardian angel, “Touch!”

Ah! do we comprehend what that vision means? Would this be our choice for ourselves, or for our children? Yet this was the baptism wherewith Christ was baptized. The ideal was real to Him. He saw rising out of the ruins of humanity a new, strange, wonderful, and holy thing, which He called the kingdom of God. He saw the vision of all men loving one another, because they all loved God. He saw the vision of all men living in purity and sincerity, because they all loved the truth. The ideal was so real to Him, that for its sake He suffered poverty, and defamation, and hatred, and, last of all, death. And it is this same kingdom of God we think of Sabbath by Sabbath; the kingdom of perfect justice, mercy, and righteousness, whose foundation is love and whose goal is blessedness; and I ask, Is the ideal real to us? Are we willing to give it our allegiance at the price which Christ paid? Be sure of it, it cannot be had without price, and in some form or other the price has to be paid. Not for us perhaps the actual renunciation of home or parents for Christ, not for us the tragic choice that martyrs made, or that heroes suffered and triumphed in; but in some way—in our business,

in our friendships, in our affections, in our manifold uses of the world—we have to choose between the service of the ideal we feel is right, and the materialism of the real which we know is wrong. Allegiance to truth and the ideal meant for Jesus that henceforth He was homeless. The demand of God falls upon Him, and He yields everything to it. He has put His hand to the plough, and He will not turn back. Henceforth His face is steadfastly set toward the cross, and what His brethren think madness we now call by another word—*Redemption*.

Once more, the doctrine of higher relationships and higher allegiance involves also a doctrine of higher rewards. We ought not to be surprised that truth is divisive in its effects, or that every great idea is a sword. We continually see men separated into parties and sects, and arrayed in irreconcilable antagonism over ideas. Any man who wants to do any good in the world in a novel way, who wants to remedy wrongs that are popular and assert rights that are forgotten, must be prepared for this. But let it be the infinite consolation of such a man, that this wider conception of life and duty, while it may bring bitter hostility, also brings its own exceeding great reward. When the first shock of separation is over, there will come a new divine joy in the knowledge that he is on the right track at last, and has room for the unimpeded play of his real convictions. He has lost Nazareth, but he has gained the world. He has lost the brothers according

to the flesh, but he has gained the brothers of his spirit.

It is not always that the fleshly brother understands us best ; often he understands us least. Those who have known us from our birth may be least akin to us, and they may learn contempt through very familiarity, like the schoolmate of Livingstone who said scornfully : "He a great man ! Why, he went to school with me !" There is often a strange jealousy, and a still stranger dulness of perception, in the affection of a brother ; but when once the choice has been made, the law of higher relationship vindicates itself. We find those with whom our souls have true kinship and communion. In the last hour of uttermost distress Jesus has a disciple who will draw the sword for Him, and another who lies upon His bosom. There are women who wash His feet with tears, and a Mary who breaks for Him the precious box of ointment. To have saved that one small home at Nazareth from disunion would have been a consummation devoutly to be wished ; but it was surely a far better thing to establish that great society of love in which every lonely soul might find affection, and every troubled wanderer a home. Do not suppose that you will ever lose anything by any sacrifice you make for Christ ; living or dying, Christ is gain. For the brother estranged, Christ shall give you the love of many a brother to whom you have brought joy and hope ; and the love that seemed lost will return to you again multiplied a thousandfold.

N.B. x Finally, Christ gives us the one infallible standard by which discipleship is to be tested. Those who do the will of the Father in heaven are His brethren. What about creeds? There is no word about them. What about the essentials of belief? Not even a hint. For what need is there to talk about beliefs? Men cannot act in this spirit unless they have first believed. He that doeth righteousness is righteous. He that loves truth to the point of sacrifice may be excused examination in the Catechism. Show me the man or woman who lives at all as Christ lived—the helper of the poor, the hospital nurse, the kindly physician, the honourable, truth-loving, and generous citizen—and I claim these as Christ's brethren and sisters. Christ's Church has no shibboleth; its one passport is love. It has no guarded portals; its walls are the blue horizon. It has no binding tests; its one test is character. For whosoever doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.

It is by this magic of love that the Church has grown, and it can grow in no other way. It has been well said that there is not one of the methods that we commonly use to-day for the propagation of a cause that Christ consented to employ.* "The sword He declined. Money He had none. Literature He never used. The Church disowned Him. The State crucified Him. Planting His ideals in the hearts of a few poor men, He started them out

* Professor Drummond's "Programme of Christianity."

unheralded to revolutionise the world. They did it by making friends—and by making enemies. They went about, did good, sowed seed, died, and lived again in the lives of those they had helped. These in turn, a fraction of them, did the same. They met, they prayed, they talked of Christ, they loved, they went among other men, and by act and word passed on their secret."

How simple it all seems, and yet this is the entire history of Christianity put into a paragraph. It describes what any man can do, a process that may begin anywhere and end nowhere, so long as a man needs love, and another man is ready to love him in the name of Christ. You ask me what is it to be a Christian? This is what it is. You ask me what are you to do? This is what you are to do. Doing this, you join the society of Jesus, which is the kingdom of God, and you are brother, or sister, or mother to the Son of God.

Learn then, lastly, that you may keep a tradition that in itself is wise and noble, and yet observe it in such a way as to inflict infinite injury upon yourself and the world. Christ broke a tradition which was eminently noble—the tradition of reverence for family claims—that He might save the world. Let us suppose that Christ had admitted that claim of kinship as absolutely imperative, and had gone back to Nazareth. What then? Then the Gospel had not been preached, and we had never heard of it. He would have saved a home from disunion and left a world to ruin. As it was, He took the bolder

course, and He was justified, for His mother hereafter learned that He was right, and His own brethren slowly changed and became His disciples. And do we not need to learn this lesson in our own time? We have our traditions of Church order, and of what constitutes obligation in the Church and the family, and the tradition is without doubt high and right. But there is a height beyond the high, there is a larger right beyond the right of our tradition. It may be that all the great fabric of our organised Churches will have to be broken up some day, if that higher right is to be attained. It may be that all our creeds will have to be dissolved, and cast anew into another mould, before we reach the final form of creed that will convince and satisfy the world. We have to learn that even good customs may corrupt the world, and that the lesser good often has to be sacrificed that the greater and diviner good may be gained. But we also discover, as the process completes itself, that the greater good always includes the less. The institution of the family has not suffered by this act of Christ's when He established the larger family of His Church. He secured forever, by this very act, the safety of the lesser family of domestic relationships. And, therefore, the one infallible counsel for each of us must be to choose always the highest right we know, and thus it will be forever and forever well with us. If for us also the choice of Christ means some great and painful sacrifice, let us make it without reluctance, for it will assuredly bring compensations which we cannot

measure, and our gain will be more than our loss. Even in this world, and this present time, there are fathers, mothers, sisters and brethren, to those who forsake all and follow Christ ; for the most certain of all certainties about the religion of Jesus is, that no man can ever suffer loss by being a Christian. Living or dying, Christ is gain.

*THE THREEFOLD INSCRIPTION ON
THE CROSS*

"And it was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin."

JOHN xix. 20.

THE THREEFOLD INSCRIPTION ON THE CROSS

IT will profit us little to inquire why Pilate wrote this inscription at all, or why he wrote it in the three great languages of the civilised world. It may have been meant as an indirect tribute to the regal nobleness of the Man whom he had sacrificed to the clamour of a mob. It may have been intended as a final insult to the priests who had browbeat and overawed him, and it is at least certain that they so interpreted it. It may have been written with some strange prophetic sense that He who was to hang on this cross was destined to be the conqueror of human souls, and to gather Hebrew, Greek, and Roman alike into His fold. There are moments of intensity which happen to most men, when for an instant they see with strange vividness ; they are swept away upon the stream of ungovernable intuitions, and their whole world is illuminated with a searching light that is divine ; and in such moments life is, for the first time, measured by a quickened and sharpened perception which allows nothing of truth to escape it. Pilate had been for hours in the grip of such a crisis. He had suddenly been brought

into contact with whole worlds which were strange to him. He who had asked with sad cynicism, "What is truth?" had dimly felt that the incarnate Truth had stood before him. He, whose only ideals of government were based on might, had been made to feel that there was another form of kingliness and power, against which the massed might of all the world was impotent. Alone of all the judges of Jesus, he had perceived what manner of man He was, and perhaps had felt in those intense and startling self-revelations of the judgment-hall, when he was judged by Jesus rather than judged Him, that in this worn and wasted man, inflexible in principle, unconquerable in soul, the world's true ideal of kingship was to be found; and it was this truth which he emphasised, asserted, and indicated, when, in the three great languages of the world, he proclaimed Jesus the King of the Jews.

But whatever were his motives, for us the incident is full of significance, and is worth our study. A language is the passport of a nation, it is the signal of its citizenship, the growth and record of its life; and to speak the language of a nation is practically to receive its freedom, and to be admitted to its fellowship. It is the barrier of language, rather than of streams and mountains, that shuts off nation from nation. For a language is something more than a mere vehicle of human communion: its words have sprung out of the life and character of a people; they breathe the secracies of their hearts and temples; they have their roots in their national ideals

and customs, in their household pieties and public creeds. And what were these three languages used in the inscription that hung above the head of the dying Jesus? Each had its own note, its own significance and character, summing up in itself the character of a nation. The Hebrew was the language of religion ; the Greek was the language of culture ; the Latin was the language of power. In the first the prophet spoke ; in the second the poet ; in the third the merchant, the legislator, and the statesman. No language has ever expressed the deepest religious thoughts of the world as the Hebrew does ; none has interpreted the poetic dreams of the race so subtly as the Greek ; none the jurisprudence and practical affairs of the human mind so completely as the Latin. In the first, man finds the wings of prayer ; in the second, the path of thought ; in the last the solid road of action, where all human feet must needs move. And thus when Pilate proclaimed Christ King in the three great languages of the world, he did more than he knew ; he asserted Christ's supremacy over religion, thought, and conduct ; he proclaimed Him King over the soul, the mind, and the daily life of men.

Now let us follow this suggestion, and see how far it can be justified.

And Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross, and it was written in Hebrew—and Hebrew is the language of religion. No man can afford to ignore religion ; man's relation to the unseen infinites and immensities which surround him is at once his

deepest care, his noblest thought, his one agonising theme of conjecture. It is the first intuition of the opening mind; it is the last thought of the mind upon which the shadow of death has fallen. Between that first and last—the one the dawn, and the other the dusk of life—there may lie many a dreary interval when the thought of God is lost; months and years when we are swept onward by the wind of undelaying purposes, and the rushing stream of human passion; but it is a thought which recurs with undying persistence, which follows us with its thrilling whisper even when we are busiest in our carnal strifes, and which at last grows loud as thunder in our ears when we know that death is near.

It was to find an answer to that thought that the Hebrew nation set itself through all its great space of national life, and it found the noblest answer which the world then possessed. The Hebrew did not argue the existence of God; he presupposed it. He began not by stating that God was, but that God created, and that God created man in His own image. The Hebrew measured all things about man by the degree in which he was conscious of God. External things and external characteristics counted for nothing. The inward sense of God and of duty to God was the supreme thing. The glory of Moses was not that he had been a splendid figure at the court of Pharaoh, or a great military captain leading a nation to its promised home; but that he lived as seeing that which was invisible. The superiority of

Jacob to Esau was that he possessed a spiritual sense which Esau lacked, and the sin of Esau was that he succumbed to the clamour of the lower nature, and had no faith in the things of the spirit. For the Hebrew,* God was the supreme thought, and in the highest moments of Israelitish national life God was so keenly realised by the individual conscience that the individual might have said with Browning :

He glows above
With scarce an intervention, presses close
And palpitatingly His soul o'er ours.

And it was written in Hebrew—"Jesus the King!" All the clearest vision, all the noblest religious thought, all the highest grace and spiritual genius of the Hebrew met in this Man, who came to His own, and His own received Him not. Where was there among all the seers and prophets a vision of God so deep and true as His who said, "I and the Father are one"? Where was the doctrine of inwardness, the teaching that the soul was everything and outward circumstances nothing, so vividly incarnated, or so powerfully taught, as by Him who asked what it should profit a man if he gained the whole world and lost his own soul? The beatitudes of Jesus are themselves the picked gems of Hebrew morality. Among a race characterised by spiritual genius, no

* This subject is admirably treated by Dr. George Matheson, of Edinburgh, in his brilliant and scholarly book, "The Distinctive Messages of the Old Religions," to which I find I am indebted for the main suggestions of this discourse even more fully than I suspected when the sermon was preached.

man ever spake as this Man. He came not to destroy, but to fulfil. He felt the great claims of the race from which He sprang, and He sent His disciples first to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Whatsoever of spiritual genius had made Moses the fashioner of a nation's morality, Isaiah the type of that seraphic form of prophecy that never failed even in the darkest hour of national apostasy, and David the greatest master of the nation's poetry, met in Jesus and culminated there. It was no mere phrase—He was the King of the Jews. It is not a mere phrase to-day—He is the King of the Jews. He is the crowning achievement of a race whose special mission it was to reveal God, and that writing on the cross is indelible, and amid all the changes of the ages has only grown clearer and more indubitable in significance—Jesus, the King of the Jews.

For us, on whom the ends of the world have come, the lesson is, then, unmistakable. In the language sacred to religion Jesus is proclaimed the King of all religion. It is possible enough that among those of us who assemble week by week professedly for religious worship, there are nevertheless many who have grown up into a mere traditional respect for religion, without realising for an instant what religion ought to mean to us. We have never really grappled with the awful question of what God is to us, and what we are to Him. We have gone on, as Jacob did, accumulating flocks and herds, and prospering in business, and have yet to cross that

brook of mysterious trial where the angel-shape waits, with whom we must wrestle till the dawn appears. But the hour comes for each of us, when the sudden night will gather, and in the darkness the wrestling angel will seize upon us. Beside some brook that is bitter with the tears of loss and suffering, that flows fast into the darkness, bearing away with it our hopes, our carnal content, our reliance on earthly joys—some river that we know has in it the swiftness and the chill of the water of death, that wrestling angel will keep tryst with us. We have sooner or later to answer the question, whether God is really anything to us, or we to Him. The day comes when we shall be forced to feel that the soul is everything, and that before its supreme claim all other claims are trifling. And in that hour there is but one name whereby we may be saved—the name of Jesus; but one stone that stands firm amid the flood, the Rock of Ages. In no other religion, in no other scheme of morality or social service, can we find security; we are driven to the refuge of Christ. Ah! to how many of us might not Christ say, as He said to Philip: “Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me?” Too often it happens in our poor blind life that love is with us in its finest forms, and is unregarded, unrecognised, or at the best but faintly comprehended; and even so it happens with those who have been reared and bred in Christianity, that Christ is with them, but is not known. They seek intellectual satisfaction in this or that fine theory of

truth, in some form of art or literature faintly tinctured with Christianity, in philosophy that at its best is but a beam stolen from the light of Christ ; but Christ they do not seek. The very familiarity with Christianity has bred neglect, if not contempt. Behold, then, Christ the King ! It is written on His cross in the language of religion, that He alone is Saviour, Redeemer, Master ; nor is there salvation in any other, nor any other name given among men by which we may be saved.

And Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross, and it was written in Greek, the language of culture—"Jesus the King." In some of the ancient paintings of our Lord one sees a triple beam upon the brow of Christ. It may be only the artist's fancy, it may be intended as a symbol ; but if we could imagine this threefold inscription dividing itself into three beams of light which fall across the world, we now see the second beam falling on the realm of culture. Christ is King of the soul, but not less He is King of the intellect. It was fitting that His supremacy should be celebrated also in the language of thought, in that subtle and most perfect language which, beyond any other that is known to us, has been for ages the finest vehicle of the finest thoughts.

What was the Greek to the world ? How may we best sum up the essence and spirit of Greek teaching and philosophy ? Broadly generalising, we may say that the Greek had taught the world two things, the first of which was the deification of

the present. There is neither past nor future in Greek philosophy. From the origin of things it turns its eyes away, and with yet more sad and fixed aversion it refuses to gaze into the future. Homer makes Achilles say that he would rather serve on earth than reign among the dead. Keats expresses the very essence of the Greek spirit in English poetry when he makes the axiom of his thought the saying that "Beauty is truth, truth is beauty." The myriad laughter of the sea, the woods with their sun-saturated shapes that dance upon the chequered lawn, the blue hill-tops and quiet vales, the grace of human beauty, the joy of human strength, the rapture of human passion—all this the Greek can sing, and in a music which will never cease to haunt the ears of men; but beyond this he has nothing to say to us. He can tell us that the world is beautiful, and so it is; he can cast a glamour of the finest imagination over all natural sights; but he has no imagination to bestow upon the future. To be beautiful is the greatest thing; to act beautifully is a thought beyond him. The one sin is ugliness, the one evil is weakness or deformity, the most fatal of all flaws a flaw of symmetry or taste. If he thinks of death at all, it is with abhorrence, and his one supreme consolation is that death is probably a final sleep:

From too much love of living,
From hope and fear set free,
We thank with brief thanksgiving,
Whatever gods there be,

That no life lives for ever,
That dead men rise up never,
That even the weariest river
Winds somewhere safe to sea.

The Greek had also done another thing for the world : he had boldly created his gods out of the materials of human nature. He had taken these qualities with perfect impartiality and had clothed them in divine forms. Power, Strength, Chastity, Love—each was a god, and therein the Greek had blundered on the great truth on which the Hebrew had built all his moral world, that God is as man, and that man may be as God. And in the language of culture Pilate declares that Jesus is King. Jesus also deified the common day, but in a new and nobler fashion, by making it a moment of eternity. Jesus felt the radiance and the joy of earth, and made Nature the parable of God's truth, the object lesson of His love and beneficence. He took the Greek axiom, that "beauty is truth," and gave it a higher significance and range by saying that truth is the only beauty, and that it is only noble to be good. And finally, Jesus fulfilled the broken hints of Greek mythology, and showed Himself as both God and man, teaching us that we may be perfect even as the Father is perfect, Himself being manhood merged in Godhood ; so that in one of the oldest creeds of Christendom millions of believers through long centuries have declared, "We believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ is God and man—perfect God and perfect man ; yet He is not two but

one Christ ; one not by the conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but by taking of the manhood into God." And thus, although in that dire hour of tragedy no one saw it, yet in the years that quickly followed the Greek also came to see in Jesus the fulfilment of all his dreams ; and in Ephesus, in Corinth, in Colosse, in Thessalonica, and in Athens itself, the Greek believed unto salvation, and washed away his sins, calling on the name of Christ the King.

For us, again, the lesson is clear. The spirit of the Greek has not left, and will never leave, the world. Wherever there is youth, there is the love of life, and joy in the beauty of the earth, and the deification of the present. It is the pure Greek sentiment which utters itself again in Emerson when he cries, " Give me health and a day, and I will make the pomp of empires ridiculous." He is unworthy of the earth who does not find, at least in the dawn of life, an exquisite pleasure in its beauty. He is not less unworthy of the heritage which human genius has bequeathed him, who finds no delight in that fire and charm of imagination which the Greek has given to literature. But he is unworthier still who does not see that Christ is the true Captain of the human mind. No man can ever reach the full stature of his intellectual life who is ignorant of Christ. To read Homer and ignore the Gospels, to study Plato and neglect the Beatitudes, to feel the heroism of the Argonauts or the Spartans at Thermopylæ, and turn away from the heroism of the cross, is to be content with the alphabet books of literature, and never to pass to

the knowledge of its culminating masterpieces. Ah, brother! rejoicing in your strength of thought, keen in your appreciation of nature and literature, in these realms also Christ is King. The deepest words are His, the noblest visions too. Do not stop short of the cross. Learn what the Greek may teach you, but say also with those Greeks who came to the last Passover at Jerusalem, "Sir, I would see Jesus." For here is incarnate truth and beauty, here is God and man, and for all the keenest and strongest minds of the world, as for all its troubled souls, there is written the conquering message of the cross—Jesus the King.

And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross, and it was written in Latin, the language of power, "Jesus the King." It was his own condemnation. If in this bruised and dying man, this rejected prophet, this outcast teacher, whom the unworthiest had that day spat upon and buffeted, there were the true elements of kingship, then kingship was a very different thing from anything that the world had hitherto supposed it. The third beam from the cross now fell across the world and transformed its ideals of power. And as with Greece, so now with Rome, that new divine light gathered up all that was of the true brightness of God in the vast order of Rome.

It serves no good purpose to defame the old religions of the world in order to magnify Christianity, and there were unmistakably noble ideals and divine elements in that great Roman civil-

isation which overspread the world. Three great ideals governed it, and they also, but in a nobler form, were the ideals of Jesus. Rome sought to fashion unity in religion, and so did Jesus, when He reduced religion to its simplest elements—love of God and man, and spoke of the one fold of faith into which the great Shepherd and Bishop of the souls of men would fain gather the whole human race. Rome aimed at universality in empire, and so did Jesus—only He sought to gain it by spiritual and not carnal weapons. Rome taught worship of the State as the basis of all religion, and fidelity to the State as the highest expression of religion : Jesus also taught that loyalty to the invisible kingdom of God and His righteousness was the only real form of religion. When Pilate wrote that title in Latin, what he did was to proclaim that Christ holds the keys of civilisation, that there is no human progress without Him, that over the conduct of men, as over the mind and soul of man, He alone is King, and that men are kingly only as their lives resemble His.

No nation ever needed this purging and revision of originally noble ideals so greatly as Rome, simply because she had been content to take them only in their material significance. The real gospel of Rome was order, good government, social discipline, just as to-day the modern gospel is sanitation, housing, and economics. There never was a nation so ardent in fulfilling the programme of physical welfare. Rome was all for what men call the practical elements of

life, and therefore she built aqueducts, and made roads, and taught the holiness of health, and toiled ceaselessly to complete a flawless social structure. We find a curiously perfect parallel in the England of our own day. We also are the most practical of peoples. Nowhere in the world is comfort so valued or so general as in England. We share the noble civic passion of the Roman, and our best men are at this hour, throughout the world, giving their most strenuous attention to the problem of how to make the city prosperous, the State content, the people happy. "Solve the problem of labour, and you will have solved the problem of the world," said a well-known labour-leader to a friend of mine the other day. "Learn the art of sanitation, and you will cut off the entail of vice," says the physician, "for vice is the product of bad air and foul environment." Perhaps so: but is that all? Is sanitation salvation, and is material comfort the soil in which the flower called "hearts-ease" grows? Rome did not find it so, nor shall we. She built up the splendour of the State, but had not learned that neither for men nor nations does the true life consist in the abundance of things that are possessed. She completed the imposing structure of the perfect State, but was bankrupt at heart. She covered the world with her great roads, but knew no road that led to peace. She filled her streets with fountains, but could not find the fountain that sprung up in eternal life. The proud misery of the Roman could have no more characteristic expression than in the half-earnest, half-cynical cry of Pilate, "What is

truth"? It was the confession of an infinite failure that burned like a torturing flame at the heart of all her greatness. The power to complete her ideals was not hers; that power lay in the hands of the man whom she had this day ignorantly condemned, but who died with the declaration of His divine kingship written above His head by a Roman hand—*Jesus the King.*

And there we may terminate these suggestions of a remote past, for there is one other question, the last and largest, that cannot be dismissed unheard. The title of King is written on the cross: do we discern therein mockery or truth? Can it be truly said that Christ has proved Himself a King? I think it can, and eighteen centuries are its witness. Is not He the King of religious truth—for where else can you show me a faith so pure, a body of ethical teaching so lofty and inclusive, a moral force that has worked so fully for righteousness? Christianity has been all too often burlesqued by those who have professed it, but is it not also true that it has produced, without a break, in every generation, men and women whom by common consent we have recognised, and even canonised, as the noblest moral achievements of humanity? And can it be an altogether vain or arrogant contention that Christ is the Sovereign of the mind, when we recollect that alone in Christian nations do we find the ripest fruit of human thought, and art, and literature? The claim of Christ to the homage of the soul is the work that He has done for the soul, and is doing still. So far as we can read universal history, there is no

cause that men have thought so well worth living for, and dying for, as the cause of Christ. There is no name that has evoked such love, such homage, such devotion; nor can I doubt that, easy and devoid of tests as are these days of ours, yet if the hour of the martyr-test came again, there are more millions ready to die for Christ to-day than there ever were in the past.

Why do men die for Christ? What is it that would enable us to die for Him to-morrow, to endure the scourging and the cross as He did, if He so willed? It is the solemn conviction which He has created in us, that truth counts for more than life; that it is better to perish in a right cause than be victorious in a wrong one; that to die upon a cross rather than sacrifice principle and duty is the divinest honour to which a man can attain; and that beyond this transitory world there is another world, where He is, and where we shall join the great Captain of our souls, if we be faithful in the day of the great tribulation. The Hebrew learned that supreme truth, and perhaps to him the lesson was not difficult, because his entire history had been a preparation for it. But the Greek, eager as was his joy in the present day, and the Roman, most practical and hardest-fibred of men as he was, learned it too; and all three knew how to say "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ."

There is nothing that ever produced on my mind so deep and memorable an impression as the ruins of ancient Rome. Forlorn mother of dead nations as

she now is, it is impossible to miss the traces of her past splendour, or to escape the pathos of her majestic desolation. One looks upon the vastness of the Colosseum, and reconstructs the Forum and the Capitol, until at last the imperial city, that was mistress of the world, once more rises in dreams and visions before the mind's eye, and all the pomp of modern peoples is forgotten in the pageant of this ancient glory that streams across the imagination. But as I looked upon Rome another vision was often with me too. I pictured to myself the unnoticed advent and slow growth of the despised faith of the Nazarene. I imagined man after man catching the glow of its new hope, and passing on the watchword of a new life. It was only when I stood among the ruins of the Colosseum that these thoughts and visions became almost unintelligible. For there the grandeur of the Roman power takes almost visible shape, and we cannot but ask : " How did the cross overthrow all this, and all it meant ? By what potent magic did it shatter the Colosseum and triumph over the conqueror of the world ? " It seems a thing incredible in the retrospect. Yet the cross did triumph, and it was by the simple magic of opening the kingdom of heaven to all believers. It taught men that the life of the soul was the only real life, and that all men had souls for which Christ died ; that all the ills of life were as nothing if the soul prospered ; and that beyond all the transitory pains and ills of life there was a kingdom where Christ reigned and where the souls of the faithful shared His triumph. There is an epitaph in

the catacombs, which Browning has put into English, which sums up all that this means: listen to it, and you will know what Christ has been to the forlorn souls of millions, and what His kingship over men still means:

I was born sickly, poor, and mean,
A slave: no misery could screen
The holders of the Pearl of Price
From Cæsar's envy: therefore twice
I fought with beasts, and three times saw
My children suffer by his law.
At last my own release was earned:
I was some time in being burned,
But at the close a Hand came through
The fire above my head, and drew
My soul to Christ, Whom now I see.
Sergius, a brother, writes for me
This testimony on the wall:
For me, I have forgot it all.

Let this poor slave of ancient Rome become our teacher. He died for Christ the King; let us at least live for Him—and perhaps for some of us this may be the harder duty. He was “some time in being burned”—and we know what that means; all the slow torture of a life of trial, of difficulty, of temptation:

But at the last a Hand came through
The fire above my head, and drew
My soul to Christ.

Time-worn doctrines now: do we realise them? Believe me, they are never truly accepted and realised without changing the entire current and aspect of a man's life. O Saviour, King of Sorrow! help us we

pray Thee, in the bitter incredulities of our thought,
the lesser bitterness of our unrestful lot. By Thy
agony and bloody sweat, Thy death and passion on
the cross, have mercy on us, who by reason of frailty
so often fail and are condemned. O most merciful
Judge Eternal, suffer us not at our last hour for any
pains of death to fall from Thee !

By Thy last silence in the judgment-hall,
By long fore-knowledge of the deadly tree,
By darkness, by the wormwood and the gall,
I pray Thee, visit me.

Come, lest this heart should, cold and cast away,
Die ere the guest adored it entertain :
Lest eyes that never saw Thy earthly day
Should miss Thy heavenly reign.

PART II

LESSONS FROM LIFE

"The mistake people make about the Bible is, that they suppose it is something written and done with long ago," said Rutherford.

"Well, isn't it?" said Trevor.

"No," said Rutherford. "The Book of Chronicles is being written every day in the daily papers. The Acts of the Apostles has ten thousand unprinted chapters. You have read one to-night."

"How do you make that out?" said Trevor.

"Haven't we seen men and women to-night who have been as miraculously saved as St. Paul? Isn't there a mysterious divine interference in human life to-day, and an invisible Divine Healer and Consoler? If men would study the Book of Common Life, they wouldn't go about saying that Christianity is played out. It is being played in with ten thousand joy-bells every day."

Conversation in the Mile End Road

"He judged the cause of the poor and needy ; then it was well with him : was not this to know me ? saith the Lord."—JEREMIAH xxii. 16.

JEHOIAKIM AND JOSIAH—THE EFFECT OF CONDUCT ON BELIEF

TO know God, to be very sure of God—to feel Him as we feel the air around us—the life within us: who is there who does not experience that passionate desire? How unsteady are the foundations of what we call our faith! How soon do they rock and sway, when some new tide of shallow negation roars around their base? A book touched with the clever cynicism of disbelief, a newspaper controversy, an inexplicable crime, a calamity that breaks our calm, some undreamed-of violence of pain that shatters our nerve, and with it the easy optimism that is born of good health, and behold the best of us are adrift. And not only these things, but the dulling influence of life itself is apt to overcome us, and the very successes of life breed a stifling mist in which God is lost. Is there a God? Does God exist?—

Some others, also, to themselves
Who scarce so much as doubt it,
Think there is none when they are well
And do not think about it.

But to most men there come hours when it would

be worth a lifetime to know God, and when we would gladly sacrifice our chief joy to be quite sure of that eternal life at which the grave makes mockery. For the chief joy of life is spiritual certitude, and he alone is strong and valiant, tranquil and wise, free and happy, who is sure of God. For him the ills of life are really vanquished, and already such an one has gained the "quiet seats above the thunder," the secret Paradise of the spirit, where alone beyond these voices there is peace.

But how are we to know God? There are two replies: the first and commonest of which is, examine, discriminate, study; or, in other words, use your reason. The Jews wondered at Christ's revelation of God, because in their sense of the word He had not studied. He did not know letters, they complained; for they could comprehend no knowledge coming to any man but by intellectual processes. Well, suppose we accept this reply, what happens? It is at least clear that very few of us could know God, even if we wished. If it takes half a lifetime of study to verify a single fact about Nature, it may well take a long lifetime of laborious study to find out God. I shall have time to do nothing else. I must examine every creed, every historic document that deals with religion, the origin and development of all beliefs, every argument of theologian and scientist; the trees, the flowers, the stones, the heavens, the stars. I must ransack heaven and earth for my evidence; and what at most shall I gain? Some faint hint of a Presence, a Force, a Power; some fluctuating

conviction that something watches over us, and that this infinite stream of various life has a supreme fountain somewhere. But have I found God? I have found some witness of an infinite Mechanician; if you will, of an Eternal Artist; but not of a God. I may read Paley's "Evidences" and Butler's "Analogy" until I am blind, and my soul will be no warmer; I shall be no whit more conscious of God. No; study does not bring us closer to God, for the poor and ignorant are often very sure of a God undreamed of in our philosophy; and down the vacant heavens there still peals the cry of Job's sublime misgiving, "Can a man by searching find out God?"

How may I know God? How may I be sure of God? There is another reply which is given throughout Scripture: *Do not reason, but do.* Try to be good, and the Source of all good will become intelligible to you, for knowledge depends upon action and conduct. To be a Christian in your conduct is to have Christ made intelligible to you; to will the will of God is to know the doctrine. It seems an almost irrational reply, but religion itself is a sort of glorious irrationality. It reverses the wisdom of man, and teaches us that what is foolishness to the Greek, and a stone of stumbling to the Roman, is the very truth of God. It breaks the teeth of our poor logic machines, and makes us begin our spiritual education where children begin. The child does not reason out his acts; he simply is good, or innocent, or loving; and goodness, innocence, and love are thus made intelligible to him. And

so the picture of this passage is of an upright, child-like man ; a man troubled with no doubts about the plain duties of life, whose heart instructs him in his conduct to the poor and needy, who eats and drinks and is soberly grateful, who reverences justice and judgment, and endeavours to live in accord with their spirit. “And was not this to know me ? saith the Lord.”

Now let us look at the two contrasted pictures of this passage.

First, we see covetousness blinding men to God. There is a strange vividness and vitality about this picture of Jehoiakim : the colours are unfaded in it : we might almost mistake it for a picture of modern life. The eyes and the heart of Jehoiakim do not exist, says the prophet, but for covetousness. He is a king’s son, and according to the measure of his time he is artistic, a lover of magnificence, a shrewd man of the world, a man likely to seize and keep every advantage which is his. He builds a wide house with spacious chambers, and it is ceiled with cedar and painted with vermillion ; but his house is built by unrighteousness and his chambers by injustice, for he useth his neighbour’s service without wages, and giveth him not his hire. One can readily see how all this came about. It is easy to reconstruct the character of Jehoiakim, for in that despotic age of kingship, Jehoiakim could do pretty much as he liked, and irresponsible power was too great a temptation for such a nature as his to resist. He can make the poor his slaves, and he

does so. There is no law to interfere with his injustice to the needy, and he does not care. His heart is absorbed in the building of his palace, as many a man's heart is to-day absorbed in building up his business success ; and righteousness and justice—the whole world of moral truth, in fact—have faded into the dimmest of abstractions. For every beam of cedar which is hewn, and every glowing mass of vermillion with which it is overlaid, Jehoiakim lost something which is worth more than all the cedar and vermillion of the world—a hold on righteousness, a faith in God. He is selling his soul, though he does not know it, for a cedar house. He will not pay wages to his labourers, but he is unconsciously paying away himself in exchange for cedar and vermillion.

The inference that the prophet draws is quite clear. By the time Jehoiakim has built his palace he has lost himself. For every stone laid in unrighteousness God recedes further from him ; spiritual things become more incredible. Moral truth becomes more difficult and less urgent, until presently the prophet adjures him : “Shalt thou reign because thou strivest to excel in cedar ?” Poor, narrow, stunted soul, what avail the paltry gains of cedar houses if thou have not God left ? Thy father did judgment and justice, and by the doing of right deeds he knew God. Thou doest evil, till by the doing of evil the very sense that realises God is lost. And, says the prophet in one tremendous burst of denunciation, which is both ironical and pitiful, this will be the end of it—

when thou diest none shall lament for thee, and say, "Ah, my brother! or, Ah his glory! but thou shalt be buried with the burial of an ass, and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem."

The other picture is of Josiah, the father of Jehoiakim, and it affords us the necessary contrast. Josiah was a good and just king, and because he was good and just he knew God. His own thirst for goodness made God real and intelligible to him. Just as covetousness blinds man to God, so philanthropy and justice reveal Him. We see what we have the power of seeing, and no more; but the development of that power lies with ourselves. The man with no soul for Nature sees no canopies of colour in the dawn, no isles of purple rest in the sunset, no vision of delight in stars, or seas, or skies. The man with a pure and poetic imagination sees these things and rejoices in them; and the power of seeing in each case depends upon the direction and energy of its development. And so it is with moral truth. The truthful man discerns truth; the just man feels that the world is moral; the philanthropic man learns by secret intuition the philanthropy of God. The man who loves his brother, whom he has seen, is led by that very experience to love and to know God, whom he has not seen.

We all admit that a man's belief determines his conduct. This subject suggests that the converse is equally true, and that a man's conduct determines his creed. Josiah's life was good, and he knew God: Jehoiakim's life was evil, and he had no God: in

each case the life produced the creed, the conduct begat the belief. St Paul speaks of those whose motto is, Eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die. On the one hand, men who believe that to-morrow they die and that there is no hereafter, may be expected to plunge deep into the turbid delights of appetite; and here belief, or rather the absence of it, determines the conduct. But is it not equally true, on the other hand, that the man who lives a sensual life loses belief in the hereafter, and says that there is no hereafter, because he has blinded his better instincts and debased his heart by sensuality? Begin to live carelessly and prayerlessly, and see whether you will not soon find your religion dissolving away like a tinted mist. Break the rigid rule of habit by which you have kept your life from transgression, listen with complacency to corrupt talk, modify the strictness of your honesty, encourage the shrewder part of you to overcome the moral part in your business transactions, and see whether next Sabbath you will not find something distasteful in the services, and before long will only feel irritation or indifference in the presence of moral truth. Who of us has not discovered that the quality of our action instantly colours our thought? Who has not found that the tendency to covetousness and worldliness within us, ever so slightly encouraged, at once reacts upon our faith, and dims for us the vision of God? And who has not also found that in proportion as his conduct is upright, his soul pure, his

temper kindly and controlled, the vision of God grows clearer to him, and spiritual things are realities? For the soul is like that fabled sensitive plant of poetry, touched and altered by all outward influences, shrinking in the presence of danger, expanding when joy passes near, thrilling subtly in every fibre to all exterior life, because it is in vital and exact correspondence with it. So the soul believes or disbelieves in God as our conduct makes spiritual belief possible or impossible. Josiah judged the cause of the poor and needy, and then it was well with him. There was no discord in his life, for his life was harmonious with fulfilled duty. "And was not this to know me? saith the Lord."

If I desire to be an artist, what course should I take? Clearly it is not enough to think about art, to study it even, or to speculate about it. I must do something. When Michael Angelo was called upon to paint frescoes for the Pope, he knew nothing of that particular realm of art, but he went out instantly into the Pope's garden and began to turn up the mould to find the right earths to grind into colour. His first instinct was not to theorise but to act. And so the perpetual voice of the world cries to us, Do something. Do the least act of kindness, and by so much you are nearer to realising that God is Love. Speak but one single word of fearless truth, and by so much you are nearer to the conception that God is Light, the very Light of infinite and unchanging truth. Put yourself under control by ever so little for the service

and help of society, and by so much you will be nearer to the realisation of the truth that God is Law, and is working by orderly means towards supreme ends. We may reverse the aphorism of Luther, and say that to labour is to pray. To do right is to know right, and in increasing measure; to will the will of God in caring for the poor and needy, this is to know Him.

If this picture stood by itself in history, there would still be truth enough about it to make it worthy of attention. But it is not a solitary picture, for the whole history of man confirms and translates it. Men are continually building themselves ceiled houses, and forgetting mercy and morality, and then God vanishes. Does not this picture powerfully suggest the lessons that we cannot help learning from such a period as the Italian Renascence? "Shalt thou reign because thou strivest to excel in cedar?" God might have said to such an age, for the people of that period did excel in all precious art and craft. They wrought marvels of cunning workmanship which are the treasures of the world to-day, but the chambers of their greatness were built by injustice, and their foundations were laid in unrighteousness. It was a glorious palace of art which rose in those fair Italian towns, but God was not in it, and because God was not in it, it failed utterly. It did not reign, it did not endure. It rose in baseless splendour, and fell in measureless infamy, and was buried with the burial of an ass. But at the same time, far away in an island that knew little of art,

there was being banded together slowly, under the compulsion of oppression, a company of men to whom justice, righteousness, and freedom were the greatest things in all the world. Puritanism was born out of righteous action. Whatever men did not know in that wide unsettlement of creed which came with the Reformation, the Puritan did know that righteousness was a duty. He began there: he built his house in justice: he would have no compromise with lying: and by his action came his knowledge of God, his quick and vital sense of God's nearness, his jubilant sense of God's approval, his searching sense of God's scrutiny, his solemn and exalted sense of God's mission laid upon him for fulfilment; and in due time he reigned, not by virtue of cedar palaces, but by that integrity of will and force of character which made him mightier than kings, and the monarch of monarchs. It is always the corrupt nation that says there is no God, and it does not say it until it is corrupt. But in proportion as a nation works righteousness, God is revealed to it, and it learns to walk as ever in the great Taskmaster's eye. To know God, we must be pure within and right without; for without this holiness, this vital integrity of conduct and sincerity of temper, we have not the organs by which God can be known.

When a man says to me, "I do not believe in God," I am entitled to ask, "What is the manner of your life, what is the nature of your conduct?" I am not surprised that the man who cheats his workmen, and uses his neighbour's service without wage

—the unjust employer, the social traitor, the callous swindler, the sweater and the oppressor of the poor —does not believe in God, for the only God he could well believe in would be a crowned fool and imbecile, who did not know what was going on in the world. Nor am I surprised when the man of rapacious and evil appetites, living only for the gratification of his lower self, tells me that he does not believe in God : I should be surprised if he did. You might as well expect the Kaffir to appreciate the frescoes of Raphael, or the Bushman to comprehend the dramas of Shakespeare. For of men, as of nations, it is true—that they do not say there is no God until some secret corruption has worked poisonously within them. I do not wish to be harsh or unjust, but more than once I have found that what were represented to me as intellectual difficulties were really moral difficulties, and that it was only when conduct had gone wrong that the creed of Christendom became a thing incredible. I have only one gospel for the man who wants to know God : it is brief, clear, unmistakable—Try to be Godlike. Make your conduct as noble as you can ; it will be the daily-brightening mirror which will catch the rays of the unseen God. Live up to the highest and best you know, whether it be little or much, and your obedience to right will be the organ by which spiritual vision will become clear to you. But if your life is prayerless, careless, and callous ; if you daily practise injustice, uncleanness, and evil, do not complain that you do not know God, and that you

cannot believe in Him. It is impossible that you should, for to do righteousness, is not this to know God? The man who is himself just cannot but believe in some central and divine justice, from which comes the germ which lives in him; and as he becomes purer, holier, and more loving, so the conception of a supreme Holiness, Purity, and Love, will become more entirely credible to him. And here the word of Christ is absolutely clear, and completes this saying of Jeremiah's by merging it into a fuller utterance: "If any man will to do His will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God."

And are there not people of Josiah's temper and conduct still to be found in the world, who are living illustrations of this truth? Is there not a frequent type of womanhood which believes devoutly by force of its own purity, its love, its unselfishness? Tennyson recognised it when he warned himself in one of the most memorable stanzas of "*In Memoriam*" not to unsettle the faith of one who believed what she could not prove, but whose hands "were quicker unto good than his." Russell Lowell still more fully depicts the same type:

She doeth little kindnesses
 That most leave undone or despise,
 And nought that sets one's heart at ease,
 Or giveth happiness or peace,
 Is low-esteem'd in her eyes.

And deeds of week-day holiness
 Drop from her noiseless as the snow;
 Nor hath she ever chanced to know
 That aught were easier than to bless?

Do we not recognise that picture of devout and helpful womanhood? Does it not recall to us our mothers, the touches of dead hands, the loving vigilance of closed eyes, the unresting labours of feet that knew not rest until the grave made them room? There is no difficulty of belief with women like these: their own lives interpret God to them. And there are men also whom we meet, who walk through the tumult of life with serene brows, who never seemed hurried, perturbed, or perplexed; men who impress us deeply by a sense of unity and completion which is rare in human life. Of such men it has been truly said that "to the rabble armies of society they set the step of a nobler life." You do not find difficulties of belief among such men: and why not? Because every hour their own lives are making Christ credible to them, and their own souls are receiving the subtle witness of God's vital nearness. Why do they know God? Because they live godly. Why does no storm of criticism shake their faith in Christ? Because they are Christly. "And is not this to know me? saith the Lord."

There are few of us whose minds cannot suggest ten reasons why Christianity is incredible, for one reason why it should be true. But as we ponder this story, does not the mystery of all these defections and disconsolate hours of faithlessness become plain to us? We have doubted Christ only when we have ceased to follow Him. Our will to do right has faltered, our thirst for good has died away, our

prayers have been short and few, our lives have fallen into pride and selfishness, and then we have lost our faith in God. We have ceased to cultivate and develop the organ of spiritual knowledge, and then we have wondered that we did not know God. Our hearts have gone out after beams of cedar and vermillion ceilings, after the vain and trivial things of a vain and passing day ; and who could be surprised that in such hours God has seemed very far off ? Is it not so with us all ? Let us be honest : let us accept Christ's infallible rule, that to do is to know, to obey is to believe. With that more steadfast following of truth will come the more steadfast faith, and we shall cry :

It fortifies my soul to know
That though I perish, Truth is so ;
That howsoe'er I stray and range,
Whate'er I do, Thou dost not change.
I steadier step when I recall
That if I slip, Thou dost not fall.

For to him that walketh uprightly the secret of the Lord shall be revealed, and the pure in heart shall see God.

THE HEBREW BOADICEA

**"And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth,
she judged Israel at that time."—JUDGES iv. 4.**

THE HEBREW BOADICEA

HISTORY, epic, philosophy, dialectic, proverb, essay, lyric, drama—what species of literature is there that is not found, and in its utmost perfection of form, within the Bible? The Bible is not a book; it is a literature. He who has mastered his Bible has achieved a liberal education. Who has not noticed a certain strange suggestiveness of thought which men gain whose minds are in close and vital contact with the Bible? Who has not remarked the obligations which the greatest masters of English prose display to this series of sacred books, which beyond all others possess the utmost dignity of thought, the keenest penetration of insight, and the most musical and majestic mastery of phrase? And this literary grandeur of the Bible has no more striking attestation than in the history of Deborah, and the great Ode which is associated with her name.

Hundreds of years before Greece and Rome had produced the immortal odes and epics which all European peoples have agreed in calling classics, the art of poetry had reached the noblest pitch of perfection among the Hebrews. In its union of fire,

grace, and majesty, its dramatic power and noble temper, its movement and its music, as of “peals redoubling upon peals, volleys upon volleys, from the saluting clarions of martyrs,” this Ode of Deborah stands unmatched in ancient or modern literature. It is one of the great productions of the human mind, and one of the great possessions of the human race. It serves to remind us how much they lose who are not familiar with the Bible, and to teach us that, quite apart from all considerations of religion, no man who has any care for literature, or any love of poetry, can afford to ignore the Bible. For in simple truth it may be said that a greater than Homer or *Æschylus*, than Shakespeare or Milton, is here.

But to those who turn to the Bible as an infallible rule of faith one word of warning is necessary. It is true that the story and Ode of Deborah are fine specimens of literature; but what about their spirit? What of the treacherous act of Jael which Deborah celebrates? What of the vile murder of Sisera over which Deborah rejoices? The only possible reply is, that treachery is treachery, and murder is murder, whether the record of it be found in the Bible or out of it. That which would shock us if related in the bald summary of the daily press cannot be palliated because it happens to be recorded in the Book of Judges, and celebrated in a great triumphal ode. God has not two standards of murder, one for Israel and another for England; and the act of Jael is no better than the act of any common felon, of any

treacherous assassin, who in our day would be awarded, not the praise, but the execration of the world. The only way in which it is possible to read such a book as the Book of Judges intelligibly is to treat it as an historic document. It gains and loses nothing by the accident of its being included in the Bible. It is simply a record of one stage in the making of a people, and it must be judged as all other similar records are judged. When we approach it in this spirit, we find much in it that is written for our instruction in godliness ; when we approach it in the spirit of those who believe every record of the Bible to be equally inspired, we are driven to the wicked folly of framing apologies for God, because we attribute to Him that which must be for ever hateful to Him. In other words, the Bible is not a collection of equally inspired books, but it is a collection of books in which the record of inspiration is found, the history which traces God's dealings with men through long ages and by varying methods.

Now let us examine this story, and the part that Deborah played in it. And, to begin with, two great lessons lie upon the face of it, the first of which is the constant association in Jewish history of sin with national decadence. Surrounded by heathen peoples, who were given up to uncleanness and idolatry, and whose very worship of Baal and Ashtoreth was associated with every provocation to sensuality, again and again the Israelites were seduced into a partnership with the vices they had been raised up to destroy. The recurring burden of these

chapters is that Israel served Baal and Ashtoreth and forgot God. Whencever this happened, retribution fell upon the people with the sure sequence of a natural law. Sometimes it was some petty Canaanitish prince, sometimes some alliance of many princes, sometimes some military adventurer, who was raised up to be the scourge of Israel. But however it happened, the stroke always fell, and cut deep and surely. Famine, pestilence, and war again and again swept over the land, and left no home without its lamentation for the dead. The moment Israel turned to the true God, sunshine returned to the land ; in the hour that God was forgotten, the darkness of national disaster travelled toward them, and overwhelmed them. Israel was like some kingdom wrested from the sea, and defended from its hungry encroachments only by the vigilance with which its dykes were manned and guarded ; the moment the watch and ward relaxed, the billows began to sweep in at the breaches of the wall, and the flood of war and ruin rolled across the land. And it is so still. The price of national greatness is a perpetual moral vigilance. When the morality of a nation is weakened, when its faith in God is sapped, when the vigour of its virtue declines, the victorious foe is always at the gate. The victor is no better than the vanquished, perhaps ; that is not necessary to the retrIBUTions that overtake unrighteousness. It is enough that the nation that knows what righteousness is, is not righteous, and for such a nation decadence and disaster are an inevitable punishment.

The second lesson is the ruin that is wrought by daily contact with evil, when evil is regarded with compliance. The first step toward doing wrong is always the dumb and unrebuked permission of wrong. It was so with Lot: he chose to live among the people of the plain for selfish purposes of gain, and he soon became tolerant of the vices which he had not rebuked. It was so with Israel in this, and in many other, stages of its history; the people gave their daughters in marriage to the idolaters, and the sons found their wives among the heathen, till the demarcations between the worship of God and the worship of Baal got rubbed out, and finally disappeared. The dyer's hand was subdued to what it worked in; the mixture of religious systems soon resolved itself into the universal prevalence of that which was unspeakably the baser and unworthier religion.

It is so with us still: not to hate a sin, not to oppose it, is not merely to permit it, but is sooner or later to practise it. Who has not discovered that there is a contagion in sin; that the mind which permits itself an evil book, the eye that does not turn away from a corrupt picture, the ear that is not jealously closed to an iniquitous voice, is soon pacified into tolerance of sin, and from the tolerance of sin passes into welcome of it; and that thus the whole life is corrupted, as the fruit is cankered by the one unnoticed spot of rottenness which slowly spreads till all is poisoned? We simply cannot indulge ourselves in friendly partnerships with evil

people without in the long run sharing their sins as well as their friendships. Of all delusions, the rankest and absurddest is, that the pure woman who marries a bad man is likely to reform him ; it all but inevitably follows that he corrupts her. It is not the water that will purify the mud, it is the mud that will pollute the water ; it is not the pure nature that will clarify the corrupt, but it is the corrupt that will slowly soak through and saturate the pure. When once the Israelitish youth or maiden had married into a pagan household, there was but one sure result : the grosser nature and the grosser form of faith prevailed ; the people “took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their own daughters to their sons—*and served their gods.*” Be sure of it, that in so intimate a relation as marriage this must always happen :

Thou art mated with a clown,
And the grossness of his nature will have weight to drag
thee down.

It is at this point in the history that Deborah emerges into fame. The Lord had sold Israel into the hand of Jabin, the king of Canaan. The spirit of patriotism was dead, and there was little to distinguish God’s people from the people that surrounded them. They had sunk in the trough of Baal-worship, and as a punishment were the victims of a grinding tyranny. The fear of Sisera and his nine hundred iron chariots shook the hearts that were once proud and free, and his military raids and exactions kept the land in constant terror. But

in the hill country between Ramah and Bethel, one woman lived who had not bowed the knee to Baal, and was incapable of fear. We know nothing of her except that she was a wife, a mother, and a prophetess, this Hebrew Boadicea, as Coleridge has finely called her. But she was no queen, as we use the word ; her queenliness lay in her unconquerable soul, the serenity of her faith, the vigour of her patriotism, the clearness and justness of her purposes.

In such an age, when women were the dolls of the harem, and such a period, when the licentiousness of Canaan had overwhelmed Israel, it could only have been a truly great woman who could thus emerge into eminence. She judged Israel ; and to her, as she sat under the palm-tree of Deborah, between Ramah and Bethel, the cowed and weakened people brought their grievances and made their appeals. We may be sure that in those appeals the name of Sisera was often heard, and the story of his tyrannies was rehearsed with dramatic vividness ; and as she heard, her horizon widened, the fire of patriotism burned more and more vehemently in her heart, the hope of redeeming Israel took clearer and more vigorous shape, till at last it dawned upon her with the distinctness and consecration of a mission, and the prophetess and judge were transformed into the military leader and the heroine.

We have a similar but more tragic story in the history of Joan of Arc, and one that may help us to

understand the character of Deborah. Deborah dwells in the hill country, in the still regions of solitude and free air, and hears from childhood the voice of the wind among the hills, and its murmur in the palm boughs. Joan of Arc is born on the fringes of the great forests of Domrémy, and in its vast seclusion, as in a great virginal cloister prepared by Nature, she trains her soul in sensitiveness to God. Both are educated by a "natural meditateness," and to each the same thoughts must have come—sorrow for a vanquished race and a beleaguered land, intense passion for God, and equally intense love of country. This peasant maiden of Domrémy heard voices calling her in the deep woods—voices of God that urged her to a great work; and I doubt not that this Hebrew woman, sitting with intent eyes and grieved heart under the palm-tree, heard them too. And to each came the growing sense that she was born to do a great work of national deliverance, and each might have said, as Milton makes the Child-Christ say:

When I was yet a child, no childish play
To me was pleasing; all my mind was set
Serious to learn and know, and thence to do
What might be public good; myself I thought
Born to that end.*

It is in such pious and profound reveries that heroism is born. It is thus that great souls are prepared for great deeds. To be a Joan of Arc, a Deborah, is not, and ought not to be, the fate of

* Quoted by De Quincey in his fine essay on Joan of Arc.

many women ; but to every woman is given the gladness of girlish reverie, the early golden hours when she walks "in maiden meditation, fancy-free," and it is by the nature of these girlish dreams that her life will be shaped. Happy is the girl who early feels that it is a solemn and a glorious thing to live. Happy is she whose ear turns from the flattery and frivolity of the world to catch the divine whispers that urge the soul to great duties and supreme consecrations. Greatness is no haphazard thing. The noble life has noble beginnings, and it is the dreams of Domrémy and Bethel that save nations.

There is more to be learned than this. I think such histories as these teach us that the power of patriotic feeling is deeper in women than in men, and that the patriotism of a nation is made by the women of a nation. The first shaping force in every life is a woman's, and it is from her lips that the child learns love of country. The man loves the provocations of adventure, but the woman loves the hearth. The ballads of a country, the fast-fading traditions and customs, the half mythical but deeply stirring memories of its bygone heroisms —how often has it been that in a woman's mind these things have been preserved ; and when the child lies on the nurse's lap it is she who makes him an historian, a patriot, a national poet, or a national hero.

We have no means of judging how far Deborah's memory may have been the storehouse of the great traditions of her race, but we have absolute proof

enough that her depth of patriotic feeling far exceeded the feeling of those by whom she was surrounded. When she unfolds to Barak her plan of deliverance, he is timid, faltering, doubtful. He does not catch fire readily ; she has to fan the spark of patriotism in him. He had probably mixed freely among all sorts of people till he had grown accustomed to the misery of the land ; whereas she, in her mountain solitude, had brooded over it till it was an unappeasable fire gnawing at her heart. Barak, soldier and captain of men as he is, can get no further than to say that if she will go with him to the battle, he will go ; but if not, he will not go. Perhaps he recognised that the very presence of Deborah in the army would be an inspiration to his soldiers which he himself could not supply, because he did not feel it. At all events, by his very attitude to Deborah we get the measure of her greatness ; for it means that of all souls in Israel this woman's was the most dauntless, the most resolved and noble :

Great in council, and great in war,
And, as the greatest only are,
In her simplicity sublime.

Of the great battle that followed we learn more from the Ode of Deborah than from the narrative of the historian. We learn that it was fought out on a wild day of wind and thunder, when the earth trembled and the heavens dropped water ; that when it was known that Deborah was in the camp the people offered themselves willingly, and

the tribes gathered to her; that the river, even the ancient river Kishon, flooded with the thunder-rain, swept away the struggling host of Sisera; that so fearful was the tempest, so full of dire combustion the heavens, that the very stars in their courses might be said to have fought against Sisera; that the hoofs of the unshod horses were broken with the rapidity of the flight over the stony plain; that the nine hundred chariots of iron proved themselves a fatal hindrance rather than a terror, and Sisera had to leap down and flee afoot; that from first to last, in spite of the defection of Gilead and Dan, and Asher, who sat still at the haven of the sea, and the cowardice of Meroz, that came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty, the battle was rapid, brief, and final, and was more than victory—it was conquest. And then it was, so far as we can judge, that upon this field of tremendous battle, while the thunder still rolled among the hills, and the Kishon roared through all its courses to the sea, Deborah and Barak sang this great triumphal ode. The very structure of the Ode vividly reproduces the scene. It is really a great choric song, Deborah and Barak singing strophe by strophe, as the victorious army moves in procession, and the whole crowd joining in the final chorus. It will be seen at once that its repetitions become perfectly intelligible, and add greatly to the dramatic power of the whole poem, when it is thus read. Let us take a section or two in illustration, always picturing, while we read, this wild plain of Megiddo, with its

fallen host, and the great procession of armed men, free at last after twenty years of oppression, moving over it, and chanting the choruses to the clash of cymbals and the rhythmic tramp of ten thousand marching feet :

- Barak.* Awake, awake, Deborah ;
 Awake, awake, lead on the song.
- Deb.* Arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive,
 Barak, thou son of Abinoam.
- Barak.* Gad dwelt quietly beyond Jordan,
 And Dan, why abode he in ships ?
- Deb.* Asher continued in the harbour of the seas,
 And remained among his craggy places.
- Barak.* Zebulon were the people and Naphtali
- Deb.* Who exposed their lives unto the death.
- Both.* On the heights of the field !
- Deb.* From heaven did they fight,
 The stars in their courses fought against Sisera.
- Barak.* The river Kishon swept them away,
 That ancient river, the river Kishon.
 O my soul, march on with strength !
- Deb.* Then did the horse-hoofs stamp,
 By reason of the prancings,
 The prancings of their strong ones.
- Barak.* Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord,
 Curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof.
- Deb.* Because they came not to the help of the Lord,
 To the help of the Lord against the mighty !

And so, to the sound of processional feet, the song goes on to its last great episode, the death of Sisera :

- Deb.* At her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay.
- Barak.* At her feet he bowed, he fell.
- Both.* Where he bowed
 There he fell dead.

Chorus by Deborah and Barak.

So perish all Thine enemies, O Jehovah !

Grand chorus by the whole army.

But let those that love Him
Be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might.

And so the procession winds its way back again to Bethel and the palm-tree of Deborah, amid the rejoicing of a freed nation ; and thus by the valour of a woman Israel was redeemed, and the land had rest forty years.

There is only one other observation that need be added : we have to remember that this is, after all, an episode in a wild and turbulent period of history, and its moral significance must be measured by the period. It is not of a woman like Jael that the Christian Scriptures declare that she is blessed above women ; it is of another woman, the mother of the Lord, whose purity, whose meekness, whose endurance of sorrow, and perfect loyalty of womanly love, have endeared her to the world, and made her the type of divinest womanliness. But whether by active valour or private suffering, by the publicity of a courageous patriotism or the privacy of an unmarked and unpraised heroism, the lesson still remains, that it is women who form the true soul of a nation, and are its unregarded saviours. The measure of the greatness of a nation is the measure of its best women. When the women of a nation are vain, or frivolous, or evil ; when their power of love, which should inspire purity, is degraded to sordid or carnal ends ; when their moral intuitions, which still justify for them the prophetic claim, are clouded ; and their power of inspiring men is forfeited by the vanity and

childishness which discern nothing in life worth coveting but finery, and nothing worth seeking but pleasure—then the true life of a nation is withered at the root. We still need the practical courage of Deborah, the meek endurance of Mary, the ideal heroism of Joan of Arc. If there be no tented field for our Deborahs, there are great social and humanitarian battlefields where without woman victory is impossible. To such noble strifes all women are called, and to the women of to-day Deborah may well set a superb example of faith, sincerity, and indomitable patriotism.

*THE BETHANY SISTERS: A LESSON IN
QUIETUDE*

"Now it came to pass, as they went, that He entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received Him into her house."—LUKE x. 38.

THE BETHANY SISTERS: A LESSON IN QUIETUDE

NO incident in the life of Christ possesses a softer beauty than the story of Christ's intimacy with the Sisters of Bethany; few have been so variously interpreted or so keenly criticised. Here and there a quiet soul will sympathise with Mary, but for the most part the verdict of the world is with Martha. We can all make out an excellent case for Martha. We can say, It would be a poor sort of world without your Marthas. We can live without poetry, but it is quite certain that we cannot live without bread. Martha represents the honest prose of life, and Mary represents the poetry; and if we must needs choose between them, give us Martha. And we can all add, with fine scorn, that the dreams of Mary will not feed us, and when the dinner-hour comes it is just as well to have a Martha in the house, as even the dreamer himself will thankfully admit.

The first thing to notice, however, is that all such criticism is utterly beside the mark. It proceeds upon the notion that there is only one sort of thing that needs to be done in the world, and that every-

body should be put to the doing of the same thing. Now, as a mere matter of fact, it would probably have been useless to set Mary to the cooking of the dinner, for she would have spoiled it. It is undoubtedly an excellent thing to see that roads are paved and granaries are full, and that the great commercial life of a country has its books properly kept and its affairs smoothly managed; but it would be an infinite loss to the world to set Handel or Shakespeare to such tasks, and to tell them to leave music and poetry alone. Martha is doing what Mary cannot do, and it is equally clear that Mary does something that is impossible to Martha. Dreams, and thoughts, and sweet emotions are as much needed by the world as bread, and we may starve in heart as truly as in body. It is a poor and narrow-sighted theory of the world which demands the same sort of work from everybody, and it is this theory of life that leads people to disparage Mary in order to defend Martha.

Nevertheless, we meet the working of this same mean and narrow theory of life in a great deal of the current thought of the day. The golden age of Socialism, so far as I can understand it, means an age when we shall all do the same thing, and share alike in the drudgery and pleasure of the world. There will be no room left for diversities of temperament or disparities of gift. We shall all take our turn in the kitchens of life, whether we have any aptitude for the kitchen or not, and I fancy that this will be a very doubtful benefit to the products of the kitchen. We

meet the same spirit in the common definition of a working man, as a man who works with his hands alone. One would suppose that the artisan was the only man in the world who worked at all, and that all who do not ply the trowel or climb the scaffold are mere idlers. Authors, preachers, merchants, do not work forsooth, simply because their work does not spoil their hands or soil their raiment. Socialism would instantly drag Mary away from the feet of Jesus, and set her to scour pots in the kitchen ; it would tell the mere thinker that he enjoys an unearned increment of the ease of life, and would set Tennyson to make roads and Shakespeare to cleanse sewers. But there are many things that need to be done in this world, and many kinds of men are needed to do them ; and perhaps, after all, we could better do without the railroad than without the mind of Shakespeare, for it is from the thinker that the true inspiration of all really noble action comes. That surely is the meaning of Christ—we do not live by bread alone ; we have souls as well as bodies, and can better afford to starve in body than in spirit. The world is wide enough for both the man of action and the man of thought, and each really needs the other, since the one is the just and proper complement of the other.

It is, however, a perfectly natural thing that we should fall into such an error, and become enamoured of the gospel of visible action. We are best pleased with ourselves when we are most active. We are all proud of what a great French writer has called the

efficacy of the accomplished effort, and we are ready to say with him : " Work is the unique law of this world, the regulator that carries organised matter on to its unknown bourne. Apart from work there is no sense of life. We appear, give our quantum of work, and pass away. The man who works is always good." And it is undoubtedly true for most of us, that we are of the greatest service to the world when we are most active ; and it is therefore natural that the glow of action should seem to us the chief joy, and the gospel of work the one wholly authentic and indisputable gospel with which life can furnish us. But there is a gospel of quietude, too, that we all need to learn, and none so much as those who are most immersed in the business of the world. The flower needs the dew and the starry heavens as much as the labour of the spade, and quiet is the dew of the soul. We need leisure to grow wise as well as shelter to grow ripe. We may waste ourselves in agonies of energy over tasks that have in them no permanent reward, and may discover too late that less work and more thought would have built for us a far nobler edifice of life. The most needful thing is not always the thing that lies readiest to our hand ; the most urgent duty is not always the most apparent. We owe duties to our souls as truly as to our bodies, and the one supremely needful thing is the culture of the soul.

Now this narrative of Christ's conversation with the Bethany sisters furnishes us with two sharply defined types of womanhood which we all recognise.

Martha is a woman who cannot bear to see any one unemployed. She is so restless that the very spectacle of rest annoys her. She is such a woman as George Eliot has given us in Mrs. Poyser, such a woman as we ourselves have met many times perhaps in our observation of life. You cannot make her sit still; nothing afflicts her so greatly as bodily inactivity. Her mind is quick, eager, severely practical, and intolerant of moods that lie beyond her limited experience. She is supremely unimaginative as she is supremely energetic. We all know the value of such women, for this is the woman described in the matchless eulogy of King Lemuel: "Strength and honour are her clothing, and she shall rejoice in the time to come. She riseth while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household and a portion to her maidens. She looketh well to her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also he praiseth her."

But for Mary there is no such eulogy as this. She seems sadly slight and inefficient beside this bustling, practical-minded sister of hers. Has she then no use or place in the world? Are all her deep thoughts, and keen emotions, and eager endeavours after truth of no avail? For we can also apprehend the nature of Mary: a woman apt to reverie because she is imaginative; full of noble passions and intuitions because she is profoundly emotional; comparatively careless of external ease because she is an idealist, living the life of the

soul and of the mind. Be sure of it, it was not Martha who first invited Christ to Bethany ; she was too serenely practical for any such unconventional proceeding. It was Mary doubtless who heard that voice and thrilled to it, whose soul went out to that divine soul, who cared nothing about what people thought or said, because she was swept away upon the tide of a supreme spiritual passion ; and it must have been she who was bold enough to bring the strange teacher of Nazareth into this orderly home of Bethany. The strange and wonderful things that alter and determine the movements of society are often effected by women of the type of Mary ; it is only such a woman as Mary who could ever have dared to introduce Jesus to the hospitality of Bethany.

It is important that we should clearly grasp these clues to Mary's character, or else we shall be quite incapable of judging the intention of Christ's words about her. Now, as a matter of fact, the average verdict of the world bears far more severely on women than on men in almost every conceivable respect, and especially in this respect, that we demand a certain uniformity of character in women which we do not expect to find in men. We admit diversity of gift in man, but are impatient of any variation of type in woman. We expect in women uniformity of domestic aptitude, and because we see how eminently serviceable such a gift is, we conclude that it is the one indispensable gift of woman. We read, for example, with amused surprise that women

authors of a century ago let no one see them writing, but did all their work by stealth, as if they were ashamed of it. Why was that? Simply because they were afraid of this terrible Martha tradition as to the proper sphere of woman. They had been taught to feel that it was almost an unwomanly thing for a woman to think or write; that the whole duty of woman was to bake, to brew, and to keep house. And what was forgotten, and what Christ remembered, was, that women are no more fashioned on a common type than men, and are not meant to share an equal destiny. There have been women like Joan of Arc and Catherine of Siena, as well as Mrs. Poyser. They are women who are contemplative, imaginative, unconventional, and their energies cannot be limited by the tasks of domesticity. They hear "the voices" as Joan of Arc heard them in the woods of Domrémy; they feel called, as Catherine was called, to step beyond the threshold of the quiet home in Siena. Their seeming inactivity is the stillness in which a great soul is growing, and by their dreams the world is to be cleansed and redeemed. Martha is a very necessary person, but the world needs Mary too; and if among the children there is a Mary, pray do not break her spirit by setting her in impossible rivalry with Martha. If you do so, France will not be delivered, Siena and Italy will not be purified by the spiritual fervour of a Catherine. And it is women who are hardest in their judgments of women in this respect; and it is the Martha who is so

consciously useful herself who is the first to denounce the uselessness of Mary. Christ saw them both with a truer eye. He recognised in Mary a nobleness of temper that her own kinsfolk did not perceive, and He said: "Let her alone; on the day of the cross she will be vindicated. She hath chosen the better part, which shall not be taken away from her."

What, then, is the spirit of Christ's criticism of these two women? It is that bodily activity is not everything, that there is a spiritual nature which also demands attention, and that it is possible to be very energetic in body at the expense of the soul. It may be, as many have supposed, that there was an implied rebuke of luxury in the words, "There is one thing needful," and that Christ meant to say that the hospitable heart that opened itself to receive His words was a more welcome thing than this elaborate hospitality of the table; that for Him, in fact, mere eating and drinking had no charm. It may be that this incident followed immediately on the parable of the Good Samaritan, and was meant to be read alongside of it, for we are all more eager to do than to think, to rush upon a duty than to sit down in quietness to digest a truth. There is a vast amount of philanthropy which, good and honest as it is, wastes rather than nurtures the soul. We may be so busy pouring in oil and wine, that we forget our plain duty to our own souls: we may be so fussily energetic even in good works, that we fritter away our finer powers of aspiration and

emotion. We may sit on so many committees of charity that we have no time to pray, and may rush hither and thither on so many excellent errands of human service, that we are never alone with God.

This is the common temptation of good people with an energetic temperament. They are proud of the number of meetings they attend, and of the general moral industry of their lives. They never have a moment to spare, and they boast of it. They are always in a hurry, and would think themselves guilty of culpable indolence if they had a morning unemployed ; and these excellent persons produce very uncomfortable feelings in people as good as, or better than, themselves, who cannot take life in quite the same spirit. The text most frequently upon their lips is “Work while it is called to-day.” They take such a text for the complete summary of the temper and life of Christ, and forget how He sought quiet, and scorn those who seek to sit at His feet, and listen for His word of truth. Christ simply reminds Martha and us that there is another side of things. “They also serve who only stand and wait.” The student of the truth is as needed as the soldier of the truth. The quiet pastor is not less honourable than the loud evangelist ; the Quaker and the Methodist are alike necessary : contemplation and energy both have their uses. Be as energetic as you will, but while you feed others, do not let your own soul starve. Pour in the oil and wine of human service, but do not let the waters of peace dry up in your own heart. There is one thing needful

—the culture of the soul, and that is the supreme thing, to neglect which is eternal disaster ; for what shall a man be profited if, after having preached to others, he himself becomes a castaway ?

So, then, out of this incident there emerges a principle—the principle that quiet may do as much for us as action, and that we may be doing most when we seem to be doing least. One hesitates to apply that principle, because few of us are in much need of its admonition. There are very few Churches that suffer from excessive energy ; most suffer from its lack. Still, if the principle be a true one, it should be stated, and we can at least test it by our observation, and see whether it be right or wrong.

Do we not see, for example, how true it is in our relation to Nature ? He does not learn most of Nature who applies himself to the task with the hottest energy. To study Nature in such a way as to understand her spirit and beauty, we must needs be humble and docile scholars. We must reject nothing, select nothing, scorn nothing. The whole art system of John Ruskin sprang from the faithful study of a leaf of ivy on a tree trunk ; he saw in it what only the quiet eye could see, that it was fashioned in a grace of design that art could only copy, but could not surpass. It is in the same spirit that Christ said, "*Consider the lilies*"—not pass them with a casual glance or with shallow praise, or with the hasty scrutiny of a preoccupied and careless mind ; but consider them in observant quiet, and in the quiet they will expound their message. A man

might photograph every lovely scene in England, and yet know nothing of Nature. Her charm is not to be captured in the flash of a camera. There are things that come unsought; revelations that are only possible to the quiet eye; so that Wordsworth rightly says :

Nor less I deem that there are powers
Which of themselves our minds impress
That we can feed this mind of ours
In a wise passiveness.

And if this be true of Nature, how much truer is it of the study of divine truth? Martha had not learned that lesson; Mary had. She had learned the art of listening, the duty of a wise passiveness, and Christ called it the better part.

So, again, is it not true in all that relates to the culture of the mind? We commonly act as though we believed the mind could only grow by feverish processes of energy. We read everything, whereas it would be infinitely better for us if we read less and thought more. It was said of Auguste Comte that in twenty years he had read incredibly few books, but that all he had read had been fruitful. It was said of Harriet Martineau that she often took an hour to read a single page, but then that page was hers for ever, and it was a page worth reading. Robertson of Brighton tells us that he had been a fortnight in reading a little book on chemistry of one hundred and sixty pages, that he expected to be six months over it, but that when he had finished it, it would have passed into the very

structure of his mind, as atoms of iron pass into the blood. Goethe tells us that mental power elaborates itself in solitude, and of this we have no more phenomenal instance than that which is afforded by the life of Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln grew to manhood and had never seen a church, had never had a year's education, had never possessed more than a dozen books ; but, says one of his biographers, "the poverty of his library was the wealth of his life." Why ? Because every book he possessed was a great book, and he had mastered it. Dozens of American youths, during the early manhood of Lincoln, had passed through college and university with honour, had read multitudes of books and had forgotten them ; but this man had just sat still, had listened to four or five wise voices, and came forth at last so gloriously equipped for his life-work that the wisest and noblest men of the land recognised his gifts of mind as well as of character, and were proud to own him as their leader. For long years he seemed to be doing nothing, and was a poor unknown man in a remote State. But in those years he had heard the voices of truth, and when the hour came a nation hailed him as its greatest man.

Does not life itself perpetually illustrate the same truth ? There are a hundred purposes and aims in life that seem precious to men and women only because they are showy and win immediate reward, and many seek them and lose the better part. They waste themselves in the consuming energies of earthly ambition, only to find some day that the

quiet man they despised, the man who prayed and loved and waited upon God was wiser, and in the end successful with a real and abiding success—which they have missed. I think we can read this lesson even in this merely suggested biography of Martha and Mary. Mary sat and listened, but was it all waste time? The time came, and came all too soon, when Christ was no more seen in Bethany, for He was dead. And do we not all know how pathetically precious the words of the departed are to us? Can we not fancy even Martha wishing that she had let the credit of her cooking suffer a little, if she could but have heard some of those sayings which Mary had heard and treasured in her heart? In that hour when she too sighed

For the touch of a vanish'd hand,
And the sound of a voice that was still,

how much would she have given if she had listened more eagerly to that voice, and gathered into her heart a fuller echo of its infinite music and wisdom? And is it fancy to suppose that the hour came when even Martha knew that Mary was right, and that she had been wrong? For when Christ was dead, men remembered His words, and they began to gather them up. They felt that the life of the world was in them, and they set to work to weave them into the Gospels. And then came Mary's turn. In those hours of seemingly useless quiet she had steeped her memory in the sayings of Christ. From the depth of that calm heart of hers she now drew

them forth one by one, like pearls out of deep water, and the world has been richer ever since by the quietude of Mary. The first place that the Evangelist would visit to gather up the words of Christ would be this home at Bethany, where Christ spoke most freely, because it was the one true home He knew. But there was only one woman there who could give him any help, and that was Mary. Martha had been too busy to listen. She could recollect nothing, but Mary had it all written indelibly upon her heart. She had chosen the better part, and Martha knew it now. The quiet of Mary had done infinitely more for the world than the bustling energy of Martha, for who can say how much of the Gospels we owe to the woman who had sat at Jesus' feet and heard His words?

This is a woman's story, and it is not difficult to see how closely it applies itself to the life of woman. One of the most pathetic thoughts about the lot of woman is that so much of her life consists of untabulated and unpraised duties : the continual recurrence of small tasks that need an infinite patience, but which win no immediate reward, and serve no visible public end. There is many a woman who says with deep regret: "Would that I could be a Mary, and have leisure to sit quiet for a little while at the feet of Christ. Once I had time to think, and write, and grow, and I felt the joy of intellectual expansion ; but now I am always tired, and my hands are never still, and my work is never done. For me the life of Mary would be an exquisite delight, but mine is

the trivial round, the common task ; and where there are many mouths to be fed, and many garments to be mended, life is too continuously laborious even for a snatched moment of Mary's quiet ! " But even if all this be true, do not forget that you still have a soul which has its claims, and that all other claims perish before these. The work will be no worse done if you have sat at Jesus' feet in the early morning hours before it begins. Do not let the energy of your nature exhaust itself alone on practical life. The day will come perhaps when your children will need a teacher and a prophetess as well as a mother, and if you cannot then be what they need, they will seek elsewhere for the guidance of the soul which it is your supreme privilege to afford. And even if you cannot be all you would like in this respect, you can at least learn not to be jealous of the Mary whose life is not as yours. The world cannot thrive without both the energy of Martha and the spiritual force of Mary, and it is possible for the true woman to unite both gifts, and being diligent in business, still know how to be fervent in spirit and devout in soul.

Or we may apply the suggestion to many other matters in the general ordering of our lives. Year by year we seek the calm and freshness of Nature, often rather as a physical duty than as a genuine delight. Do not grudge the hours that are given to that relaxed and unenergetic interval of calm. It may be that most is happening to you when you are doing least ; and while the world counts you to be

doing nothing, you are silently preparing yourself for doing very much indeed to help the world. If you attain a deeper calm of spirit, if you use the golden leisure to draw nearer God, if in the still hours of unaccustomed peace the silence of eternity possesses and tranquillises the soul, the time will not be wasted, and the quiet may have done more for you than many months of vexed and anxious effort, even though that effort wears the guise of noblest duty.

Or the theme may find its application in relation to the worship of the sanctuary. A merely superficial observer might look round upon a crowded church and say: "Why are not these people out working in the highways and hedges? How much better they would be working than listening!" But he would be wrong, as the world which defends Martha and despised Mary is wrong, and for the same reason. Public worship means the admission of the truth that the right development of the soul is the one thing needful; that before we can teach truth, we must know it, and that to work well, we must first learn to pray well. The one thing needful is that we may learn how to be true disciples of Christ. All other things will pass away, and perish, and become worthless; but to know Christ and to live by His words will be our eternal joy. All energy that leads us away from Christ is misapplied and wasted energy, and one hour at His feet may prove more to us, in the rekindled loyalty to truth it brings, than a lifetime spent in laborious forgetfulness of

Him. Contemplation is the true spring of labour. It is possible to unite the spiritual life of Mary with the fervent diligence of Martha, and thus

Be Martha still in deed and good endeavour,
In faith like Mary, at His feet for ever.

REDEEMING IRRATIONALITY

" And ofttimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him: but if thou canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us. Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears: Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief."—MARK ix. 22-24.

REDEEMING IRRATIONALITY

THE interest of this passage lies in two directions, the first of which is the moving pathos of the scene. It is human—all too human, we may sadly think—this unhappy father, this unhappier child. It is at least bitterly true to the tragic facts of life. One feels sometimes, in reading the Gospels, that no human eyes ever saw so much of the sorrows of the world as the eyes of Christ in those three short years of His ministry. The land poured out its misery to meet Him. His sermons were punctuated by piercing appeals for aid. The sound of flute-players and funeral horns broke in upon the music of His beatitudes; His progresses from town to town were attended by the great army of the sorrowful and disinherited, and were stopped by the passage of dead along the roads, the wail of cripples in the city gates, the hoarse maniac voices of the demented and excluded. Yet it was as it should be. To fashion perfect axioms for human conduct in solitary seclusion is not the way to save the world. He who would redeem men must know them; must know them in all their rags, their loathsomeness, their incurable vices and afflictions.

He must see life not through the coloured glasses of the dreamer, but in its bare and base reality. He must know how to heal as well as teach. Few of us have ever yet realised how intensely practical, and what a real ministry of human aid, the life of Christ was. We have been so busy explaining His thoughts that we have forgotten His conduct. We have built the tabernacle for His apotheosis on the Mount, and have turned away too much from the terrible outcries and unstaunched weeping of the valley.

The second direction in which this passage is profoundly interesting is the man's natural perplexity and Christ's way of meeting it. This man found faith difficult, and his story teaches me how to say a helpful word to those who are perplexed in soul, those to whom the greatest doctrines of Christianity are half incredible, those who desire to believe, but cannot. There are many such among us. When we soberly reflect on the amazing doctrines of Christianity, we cannot but admit, in proportion as we are sincere with ourselves, their entire incomprehensibility. To how many forlorn ears do the Christmas bells chime a golden mockery, and how little is there in human life, as we know it, to make the truth of a divine revelation credible! What is faith in Christ? What does it imply? How are we to set about it? To those questions this touching story affords an answer. We have before us a man not merely in the throes of sorest trouble, but of direst intellectual perplexity. We

cannot be more perplexed about a doctrine than this man was over the person and claim of Christ. The agony of doubt, of reluctant doubt and unjustifiable hope, vibrates in his very words ; and we see in what spirit Christ meets his perplexity, and by what means He solved it.

“*If Thou canst do anything,*” says the man ; and what he means is : “Alas ! Thou canst not do anything, for no one has yet done it, nor is it in the bounds of human reason to expect it.” What a world of unspeakable sadness is in that word ! We also have seen men like this father, and have heard them stammer out this same cry. They have been men with worn faces and faded eyes—ground out of all shape, as it were, by the cruel usage of life ; working for scanty bread, and coming home to grapple with domestic tragedies ; fretting themselves out in a continuous battle with the irony of circumstance ; men with sick wives, rebellious sons, bad daughters, tragic homes ; men who have tried everything, and despair of any deliverance in this world, and when you suggest hope, they can only say, “Sir, do not mock me ! *If thou canst !*” This man does not profess to believe that Christ can help him ; he only hopes so, and his hope is what Carlyle would call “a sort of valorous despair.” His mind cannot accept the possibility of any one ever being able to do anything for this unhappy child of his. But his heart goes out in faint, tremulous belief towards Christ. It is the merest fluttering of hope within him, as of a pulse which long pain has almost

extinguished ; it is the faint and timorous touch of a child that has been so often beaten that he can hardly conceive of such a thing as love. The reply of Christ is that this is enough. Let his mind doubt as it may, so long as the heart trusts, Christ will not attempt to prove to him that He is any better able than any one else to help him ; He leaves the man's reason and judgment alone. But He regards that faint motion of the heart towards Him as all-important. "*If thou canst*," says Christ, repeating the man's own words, "all things are possible to him that believeth." And the man—"with tears," as one version has it—replies : "Lord, I believe ; help Thou mine unbelief."

Now, what justification is there for this method of dealing with stubborn incredulity ? Does this incident cast any helpful light on the great problem of doubt and unbelief ? For unmistakably the attitude of men to-day toward Christ manifests this same reluctance of trust, this same pathetic bewilderment of thought, this same timorous and half-rebellious reverence. Like a sad wind wandering round the world, the cry is always rising, *If Thou canst do anything !* In the darkness of its sorrow the world wails incredulously at the feet of this legendary Christ—*If Thou canst !* It is not that our faith is tried by any severer tests than those knew who have gone before us, but only that our life has become more complex, our minds more full and sensitive, and somehow, with the widening of know-

ledge the heart has lost its mastery, and the mind has seized upon it. It is not that we do not wish to believe: the agony of the age is, that, with the best desire to believe, we seem incapable of belief, and it is an agony which has broken the heart and effort of more than one man of genius in our day:

For we are souls bereaved:
Of all the creatures under heaven's wide cope,
We are most hopeless who had once most hope,
And most beliefless who had once believed.

We seek out this fugitive Christ, and when we have found Him we cannot persuade ourselves that He can help us. We attend the services of the Church, and sing hymns of faith and aspiration, but our hearts say all the while—*If—if—if—Thou canst*. We turn away from the tragic miseries of life, torn with the vehemence of our ineffectual sympathy, stricken with the shame of our impotence to heal the world, and our sobbing becomes a reproach—an accusation—a defiance—*If Thou canst help us—O why is not help forthcoming?* What has Christ to say to us? Has He anything to say, and can He deliver us?

Now, the first reply that Christ gives us is, that belief is not a thing of the mind at all, but of the will, or, as Scripture uniformly puts it, of the heart. Christianity treats the heart as the dominating factor of man's nature, not the understanding. It is with the heart that a man believes unto righteousness. It is because men are pure in heart—not strong in

intellect—that they see God. The man to whom God looks is he who is of a broken and contrite heart. When we ask for signs and proofs, Christ replies—No sign shall be given unto you. When we ask for evidence that shall completely persuade the intellect, that shall overwhelm and master it, Christ replies that it is the persuaded heart He wants, because that is mightier than intellect, and is diviner, and is meant to rule the intellect. His great question is not “Understandest thou this?” but “Believest thou this?” It is to our intuitions, our will, our soul, that His appeal is made; and, as Pascal has reminded us, the heart has reasons that the reason knows not of. Is that a fair appeal? Is this method of Christ justified by our knowledge of ourselves?

I think it is, when I remember that the greatest acts of which human nature is capable are acts of will that dominate the understanding. Of course, in very many acts of the will the understanding coincides, and our intuition is approved and strengthened by our knowledge; but I repeat that the greatest—that is, the noblest—acts in a man’s life are constantly prompted by a power that is not the understanding, that often sets it at nought, that acts without it, or even in defiance of it. Take for example that whole world of action in which we find the great records of love, and heroism, and chivalry. When a man loves, when his whole nature is gathered up in some great signing away of himself, some consummate deed of self-surrender and bestowal, does he first of all argue with himself on the nature of love?

Does he seek to prove his case at the bar of his reason? Is it the mind that rules him, or the heart? Is love an intellectual process, or something more intimately spiritual, more divinely masterful? When a man flings himself into the imminent deadly breach, when he takes the torn standard into his hand and hurls himself against a host, when he turns his single ship against a fleet of fifty galleons as Grenville did, or leaps into the chasm of the Forum as the legendary Curtius did, or holds the bridge across the Tiber as the immortal Three did in the great ballad with which we are all familiar—does he perform an act that is begotten of his understanding? In not one single instance of all that we know as noble love, and nobler heroism and chivalry, can we discern the work of the intellect. Such acts are the children of a glorious irrationality—a sort of noble madness. The heart in a man rises up and deposes the mind, and it is the supreme passion of the heart that expresses itself. The will takes the reins into its own hands, and acts in scorn of consequence. Therefore it is to the heart that Christ appeals. He says not, "Have I proved myself to you?" but only, "Lovest thou me?" And it is because His appeal is to the heart, that unnumbered myriads in the past have been willing to die for Him, and that innumerable human souls still cry, "I am persuaded"—in spite of the ironies of science, in spite of the imperfection of evidence, in spite of all hostile argumentation—"that neither life, nor death, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,

nor any creature, shall be able to separate me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus."

"But this is pure irrationality," you may reply. Let it be so, if you will; only I must remind you that life would be a poor thing but for the redeeming irrationalities of its highest moments. It is an irrational act when yonder man plunges into the sea to save his fellow, of whom he knows nothing, and is wholly unable to tell whether or no his distressed life is worth saving. It is an irrational act when the martyr goes to the stake for a truth, and a truth which no process of argument can render absolutely conclusive to the mind; when an Elijah bars the chariot of Ahab with a gesture, and John rebukes a Herod to his face; when the six hundred ride into the valley of death, into the mouth of hell, literally hurling themselves upon a host: but these are irrationalities which mark the highest hours of human history, the noblest acts of human life. Patriotism, love, self-sacrifice, martyrdom, are supremely irrational passions. Prayer is the climax of all irrationality; yet to that silent sky what unnumbered lips address their desires, and dimly feel that more things are wrought by prayer than this world knows of. These acts are acts of moral venture.* They can only be performed when the soul is master of the man; they are only possible to men in supreme hours when the will and the heart are permitted to dominate us. And it is so with faith—it is moral venture. The

* *Vide* Canon Scott Holland's "Essay on Faith" in *Lux Mundi*.

heart rises up like a man in wrath, and says, "I have felt!" We suddenly depose the mere logical faculty, and obey the spiritual part of us, crying: "I believe; help Thou my belief!"

The act to which Christ invites this man, and invites us, is then an act of chivalric moral venture. That is what belief really is. All things are possible to him that believeth, for the man who believes is suddenly made free of a larger world. He puts in motion forces which carry him onward into realms unknown to the understanding. Oh, are there those of us who have long doubted, lingered, hesitated, till we are sick with the dismay and endless vacillations of our thought? Have we argued with ourselves till we are tired of argument, and read books of evidence till we are weary of evidence; and have found ourselves now and again for a moment on the verge of light, but always falling back into deeper darkness, more disastrous night? Here, then, is the door of escape. Christ's appeal is not to the mind at all, but to the heart and will; it was the heart that took Christ to the cross, and it is by the heart alone we can find Him. The moment a man lets his will go out to Christ, his heart open to receive Him, that moment a new and vital glow of joy fills his life; the miracle is wrought, and he has peace through believing. There is no other method. It is with the heart that we believe, and to him that believeth all things are possible.

And now look at this story again, and see how distinctly these conditions are fulfilled in this man

His mind and will are almost visibly at strife. We can mark the ebb and flow of his thought and emotion, as we might stand on the beach when the wind blows strong from the shore, and see the tide come in, disputing every inch with the strenuous wind that would beat it back. The heart cries "Forward!" and the mind cries "Back!" With his mind he cannot believe; he cannot understand that what no other has ever done for his tortured child this stranger can do; but the tide of his heart is slowly setting towards Christ, and gathers force each instant. And it is as though the wind ceased, and the tide swept up in one vast unvanquishable wave, when he sees that, although he may not believe with the mind, yet he may believe by the heart; and he cries, "I believe; help Thou mine unbelief!"

And for this generation, with its perplexities and spectres of mind, is there any more luminous and necessary word than this man's? For there is no mistaking the fact that the mind cannot be made to believe. We are not to be dragooned into faith. We do but injure ourselves and play the hypocrite before the world, when we impose creeds upon the mind which we secretly doubt or regard with infinite misgiving. It would have been easy for this man to say glibly, "I believe," when his heart was far from Christ; but he is the supreme type of a spiritual honesty and intellectual sincerity which we all do well to covet. He will not make his judgment blind; he will confess to the face of Christ that his mind is wholly unpersuaded, even though his

child be not healed and he himself contemptuously dismissed. He will not profess a belief he does not feel, and that is a temper to be admired and honoured. I would ten thousand times rather that men called themselves Agnostics honestly, than that they should dishonestly recite, Sabbath by Sabbath in church, creeds to which not a fibre of their mind really responds. Depend upon it, God prefers honesty to subservience—the honesty of revolt to the subservience of intellectual hypocrisy. Christ would rather be struck by the hand of the open enemy than wounded in the house of His friends; the scourge hurts Him less than the supple hand and kiss of the betrayer. Be honest, is Christ's first law; for it would be better, if such things could be, to go to hell with an honest mind than to buy heaven by a traitor's vow. And somewhere in this man's soul there throbs the fibre of this unconquerable honesty; and hence his cry is not only the cry of a noble despair, but of a sublime sincerity—"I believe; help Thou mine unbelief!"

And it is enough: in that cry he finds Christ; and thus alone we may find Him. For take the great doctrines of the Christian creed which are preached Sunday by Sunday, and say whether it is by the mind or the heart we receive them. Who can finally demonstrate God to his mind? Who can make the mind understand the mystery of God born of a woman, subject to the cruel hands of men, raised into immortal life, and raising with Him all who trust in Him? Who can understand or explain in what way the death of Christ became a reconciliation and

atonement for the whole world? To each and all of such dogmas the understanding opposes its stubborn "if." We reflect upon the enormous evils and sorrows of human life, and we say with Carlyle, "But God does nothing!" We find sometimes a sudden falling away in ourselves, and the traditional props of creed with which we have buttressed our judgment crumble and melt; and again, like Carlyle, in some spasm of despair, we perhaps look at the crucifix on some high dome, or the figure of sorrow on some roadside Calvary, and say, "Ah, poor fellow, your day is done!" Let us be honest at all hazards. Others besides Carlyle think these thoughts. We have thought them, and perhaps feel their cruel urgency even now. And it will always be so while men rely only on the intellect for their apprehension of Christ. New thoughts will shake the foundations of their creed; new currents will sweep them away. And therefore Christ once for all affirms that faith in Him is a glorious irrationality—as irrational as love, as heroism, as martyrdom. Faith in Him is something which transcends reason. It is the supreme cry of the heart: "I believe; help Thou mine unbelief!"

Nor is this a strange and unfamiliar fact in human experience, as we have already seen. Other beliefs, besides belief in Christianity and Christ, imply a suspension of reason. Belief in immortality, for example, or at least in some form of life after death, is not peculiarly a doctrine of Christianity. It underlies every religious system of the world; and yet, judged by the

pure reason, nothing is more incredible. The facts are dead against it. There is nothing in Nature to justify the belief. If Nature teaches us anything, it is her absolute indifference to individual life, for she will squander millions of lives in the perfecting of one, and then destroy the perfect as ruthlessly as the imperfect. Even if man could be supposed to survive death, there is no evidence that the knowledge which the wisest gains in this life would be of any use to him in any other life; and as for the unwise—the imperfect, criminal, and deformed creatures who crowd the highways of life—who could wish for these an immortality? So we may justly reason; and who does not admit the force of the reasoning? Yet the fact remains, that there is something in man that whispers of immortality; that every religious system of the world is based on this belief; and that for long ages the greatest men have clung to it: so that from Job and Plato to Tennyson and Browning, the master-minds which have moved humanity have been nourished on this sublime improbability. But has it been the creation of the mind? No: only and always, this belief has been born in the heart, the soul, the intuitions of men, and generations have passed into the final shadows, crying in some such words as Tennyson's:

Thou wilt not leave us in the dust:
Thou madest man, he knows not why:
He thinks he was not made to die:
And Thou hast made him: Thou art just.

We are not minds alone—we are souls; and the

soul is more than the mind. Where the mind fails and falters, the soul advances, and at the feet of Jesus cries, "I believe; help Thou mine unbelief"; and believing, all things are possible.

At least, it is certain that if this man had obeyed his intellect alone, he would never have come to Christ at all. What all the physicians of Judea had failed to do—well, was it likely this wandering carpenter could achieve? Was he to give credence to naked supernaturalism? It is so we reason still. The last ditch at which the intellect fights is this same supernaturalism. But can any man tell me what is natural and what is supernatural? Four hundred years ago, when our ancestors wished to injure an enemy, they fashioned a wax effigy of him, and pierced the effigy with nails, or melted it before a fire, and believed that by this species of vicarious crucifixion their will could touch his, and that he would suffer and die. To-day we esteem this a foolish tale of mediæval witchcraft; but also to-day we have proved that it is possible to control the will of another man without the medium of a wax effigy, and we can all chatter of the wonders of hypnotism and telepathy. And what do we call these? Are these natural or supernatural forces? Fools that we are, which of us can tell what lies outside Nature and what within it? Fifty years ago, the notion of flashing words round the world on a wire would have seemed miraculous and impossible; but to-day we talk of using the waves of the Atlantic to carry our whispers without any cable at all, so

that even the astral body of Esoteric Buddhism may not be so supernatural or absurd as it seems. And if we know not the thing that is least, how shall we know the thing that is greatest? If we cannot really draw any line between what we are pleased to call the natural and the supernatural, how dare we say that miracles do not occur? And since the power that thinks in us is only one factor of our nature, and has associated with it a power that feels, and a power that wills, how can we tell what miracle of divine renewal can be wrought in the part that wills and feels when we come into contact with the spiritual magnetism of Christ? Let the mind debate its reasons; there are more things in earth and heaven than are dreamed of in our philosophy. Even of a daisy, a poet can write:

O daisy mine, what will it be to look
From God's side even of such a simple thing!

And it is God's side of things we reach when our heart goes out to Christ. We enter the world where miracle is the law of life; and the soul is renewed by methods that the understanding, even at its highest, fails to comprehend. Oh, let the heart rule you; let the soul go out in the apprehension of Christ; and even if your mind be full of doubt, still you may say, "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief!"

No; if we would find Christ, we must do so by His method. To understand love, we must love; to understand heroism, we must be heroic; to find the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, our hearts

must go out to Him. And then—we know not how, nor can any one explain it to us—there will come the answering touch, the flash, the glimpse, the vision, the knowledge which the soul gains of her living Lord. We shall look at the world then from God's side, and realise that what has happened in the renewal of one human soul has in it the augury and potency of the redemption of the whole world. We shall feel, rather than see, the secret forces that move the world on to its divine consummation, and our faith in Christ will give us hope for all men. There will be no question then of whether Christianity is played out; we shall rather ask, "Is it played in?" We shall not cry, "Poor fellow, your day is done!" we shall rather say, "Has it come? It will come by-and-by." We shall realise, as even one of the most sorrowful and noble doubters of our time realised, by the vision of heart in his last poem, that there are miraculous possibilities with God, unmeasured and unmeasurable by our reason ; and we shall say :

For while the tired waves, vainly breaking,
Seem here no painful inch to gain,
Far back, through creeks and inlets making,
Comes silent, flooding in the main.

And not by eastern windows only,
When daylight comes, comes in the light ;
In front the sun climbs slow, how slowly,
But westward—look, the land is bright.

Do you then want to be a Christian ? Would you wish to take some decisive step which shall number

you in the discipleship of Jesus? If you desire to join this church, I shall not ask you whether you believe in the Incarnation, the Atonement, the Resurrection. I shall not catechise you, and expect a definition of the great dogmas of Christianity from you. I shall ask you one question only: Do you wish to be like Christ: will you honestly try to live as much like Christ as you can? If you say Yes, out of your soul, to that question, the reply will content me, and I think it will content my Master. For this is to make what Christ accepted as a sufficient declaration of allegiance in this man: it is to say, "I believe; help Thou mine unbelief."

SPIRITUAL GRAVITATION

"And bringing into captivity every thought to the
obedience of Christ."—2 COR. x. 5.

SPIRITUAL GRAVITATION

THE thought of the apostle in this passage is a very simple and natural one: it is a contrast between the warfare of the hands and the warfare of the mind and soul. There were many things to remind him of the warfare of the hands. Wherever he moved throughout Europe the havoc of the sword was visible: from Jerusalem to Rome, as he travelled, the tramp of the Roman legionaries echoed on the road, and the vast bastions of the Roman despotism overshadowed him. But, like all men of fine contemplative genius, he was aware of a force mightier than the force of armies which was always working in the world; viz., the force of ideas. We also realise that force, and the world of to-day is vastly more interested in the period

When Plato was a certainty
And Sophocles a man,

than in tracing the movements of the vastest armies and the conquests of the greatest peoples. The thoughts of these men provoke an infinitely keener attention than all the battles by which an empire grew, or by which it was destroyed. For the one

permanent interest of men is in ideas. Empires perish, but thoughts live. Soldiers are forgotten, but teachers are remembered. The man who starts a new idea, who sets in motion a new train of thought, has done something that will be remembered and will bear fruit long after the map of the world is altered by successive conquests, and the greatest dynasties are forgotten. We recognise to-day that it was the thoughts of Voltaire and Rousseau that made the French Revolution ; that the ideas of Cobden have altered the commercial life of England. Paul recognised in the same way that in the ideas which he had learned of Christ there was a force which would ultimately subdue the world, and that these ideas were the mighty weapons by which all the strongholds of evil were to be finally overthrown.

Every idea is a sword, it has been said : it pierces to the dividing asunder of a man's life. And how powerful a weapon thought is, we see by the contrast which St. Paul institutes between carnal and spiritual weapons. The carnal weapon may subdue, but it cannot convince. Rome may make a desolation and call it peace, but it has only driven the fever of revolt inward. So long as thought is unsubdued, despotism is in peril. The only real conquest of man is the conquest of his thought ; and the long and bloody catalogue of religious wars, martyrdoms, and persecutions, prove, or ought to prove, to us conclusively the folly of all carnal weapons when directed against the souls of men. So, then, the

truth that Paul teaches is this : that the world is to be won for Christ only by the conquest which the ideas and thoughts of Christ make over the souls of men. And if this is a warfare of ideas, first of all it is clear that thought itself must be disciplined into the obedience of Christ. You must marshal your thoughts as you would an army. You must discipline them into order, vigour, and aim ; you must permit no disorder or moral slackness, any more than a military commander permits mutiny among his men ; and in the degree that our thoughts are thus the disciplined servants of Christ, we shall make an impression on a hostile world, and subdue it. If the world is hostile to Christ to-day, it is because Christians have not been obedient to Christ, because with us those staple thoughts and ideas, out of which temper and conduct grow, have not been brought into captivity to Him.

The first thing to observe, then, is that any conformity to Christ which does not include the thought—by which I mean the innermost intents of the mind and will—is vain and partial, and vain because it is partial.

Now, we are all aware that there does exist a certain conformity to Christ which does not include the thought. We call ourselves a Christian nation : so we are in the sense that we respect the name of Christ ; that we put the name of God upon our coins, and use it in the oaths of our law courts ; that we have covered the land with Christian churches, and every Sunday can point to thousands of people

who sing Christian hymns ; that we have a vast literature poured out of the press day by day, which is more or less inspired and tinctured by the ideals of Christianity. We erect a building called a church, and draw men and women into it, and point to this visible organisation of a Christian society as the obvious proof of our respect for Christianity ; and so it is, in so far as it means sympathy with those truths and doctrines which Christianity embodies. And in the same way we have various means and rites by which we publicly profess allegiance to Christianity—by confirmation, by baptism, by the sacrament of communion, by open attestation to a creed, or profession of discipleship ; and having transacted these rites and submitted to these solemn publicities, we straightway profess and call ourselves Christians. But is this all that is necessary ? Is this really Christianity ? We know that it is not, because Christianity is a spirit, a temper, a life. The moment we come into close quarters with ourselves, and probe our souls with any genuine sincerity, we are aware of whole domains of our nature which are in revolt against Christ. For one man, religion is a creed ; for another, an emotion ; for another, a tradition. Our nature is like a land only civilised in part. There are wide tracts over which no spiritual civilisation has passed, and they are yet in spiritual barbarism. For what is Christianity ? What is it to be a Christian ? This is the reply, and the only comprehensive and complete reply : that every thought—that is, every intent

of the mind and soul—is brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

There have been many men, and among them some of the greatest and most gifted, who have kept diaries in which they have noted every phase and fluctuation of their spiritual life, and these books, these intimate records of the human soul, are among the most precious possessions of literature. I do not commend the practice as a healthy one. I could easily point out many ways by which such a practice is apt to develop into morbid introspection, and, instead of producing a strong nature, rejoicing in its health, produces a hectic creature, with the finger always on the pulse, absorbed in a vicious vivisection of thought, and feeling, and desire. Health is unconscious of itself; it is only disease that tabulates its temperature and registers its pulse. But, nevertheless, I can conceive of nothing more wholesome for many of us than to tabulate the real thoughts and feelings of a single week of our life with unsparing accuracy and devout sincerity. How many times have we prayed during this last week? How often have our thoughts had wings and sought the skies? How much of our thought has been wholly vain and trivial, sordid and selfish, or carnal and evil? How much of our thought is the thought that might have passed through the mind of Christ, because it bore the plain stamp and impress of His spirit? Ask such questions honestly, and they become a gauge of how far we are, or are not, Christians. It is a humbling but a wholesome

process, for we learn by it how far it is true for us that every thought is brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

So far as the claim to be a Christian country goes, we have a diary of our life kept for us—a diary which is open to all eyes, and which we call the Press. Let us suppose that we had just read the Gospels for the first time; that they have touched us to the quick, and have left upon our minds a vivid impression of what the life of Christ really meant in its complete unworldliness, its contempt of fame and wealth, its simplicity and spirituality; and with this impression still strong upon us, let us further suppose that we look into the daily paper, which is the public diary of a nation calling itself Christian, that we may ascertain what sort of thing a Christian nation is. What do we read? We have plentiful records of crime and lust, of lives wrecked by passion or slain by want, of injustices that are unremedied after ages of legislation, and sorrows that are unhelped in the midst of immeasurable riches. We have a great space of this daily record of life filled up with buying and selling, with the memoranda of pleasure and frivolity, with histories and incidents that prove conclusively how a people called by the name of One who had no place to lay His head are aflame with avarice, and how the followers of One who took no thought what He should eat and drink, are eager for the gratification of every appetite. We have advertisements appealing in a hundred forms to human cupidity, to the

love of display, to the instincts and needs of the flesh ; but from the beginning to the end of this public diary of a nation's life, one might search almost in vain for a dozen paragraphs that Jesus Christ might have written. We find, on the contrary, the record of opinions, tempers, and ideas, which He would have instantly and indignantly condemned.

Do I exaggerate ? I think not. Read the Gospel of St. John and the daily paper side by side, and tell me how many points of real contact and accord you can discover. Is it wonderful that the Buddhists, who know us only by these outward evidences, are preparing to send missionaries for our conversion, because they think no nation needs conversion so much ? And what is the explanation of this hideous discrepancy ? It is simply that the thought of the nation is not brought into obedience to Christ. We have contented ourselves with merely formal and superficial professions of Christianity, without opening our hearts to its true spirit ; and, so far as the real practice of religion goes, no one can doubt that religion, in the only form they know it, rules the lives of Buddhists and Mohammedans far more intimately than Christianity governs the average life of the England that calls itself Christian.

And as it is with the nation, so it is with the Church, and the individual. The reason for the comparative failure of Christianity is simply the failure of Christians to be Christians. There is too much justification for the saying that the Christianity

of Christ has yet to be tried. Our souls are only partly civilised by the influence of Christ, and with many of us it is the merest fringe of our life that has taken the dye of Christianity. We are Christians for a few hours a week, when music and oratory stir and quicken our sensibilities; but once outside the church, we behave as though we had never been inside it. Even with the best of us the thought is not subjugated; it perpetually breaks bounds, it rushes hither and thither in pagan license, and it is not such thought as could by any possibility have passed through the mind of Christ. Let the mind that was in Christ Jesus be the mind that is in you, was the adjuration of St. Paul. Let there be no section of the nature that is unsanctified, unsubjugated, uncontrolled by the Spirit of Jesus. Let the whole life be religious, and let there be no act in it that is at variance with the highest ideals of Christianity that Christ has taught us. When that point is gained, then, and then alone, are we true Christians; and only by this absolute subjugation of the thought and will of a people to Christ can there be such a thing as a Christian nation.

The second thing to be observed is, that the thought can be disciplined; and it is necessary to say this, and to insist on it, because many of us assume that there is something elusive in thought, something so wayward, subtle, and intractable, that it lies quite outside the control of the will. A man often says, "I cannot help my thoughts:" so far as deeds go, he may be moral and reputable enough; but in his

thoughts, malignity, or passion, or avarice, or impurity riot unchecked. He assumes that, so long as he does not commit murder, he may think it; so long as he keeps within the bounds of morality, he may imagine immoralities. Men will cherish the most violent animosities, and think that it does not matter so long as they do not act upon them. They will read the most vile books, and suppose that no blame attaches to them so long as their actual conduct remains pure. Or, if they admit that they are tortured by such thoughts and imaginations, that they are loathsome and abominable to them, that they come unsolicited and are hated and dreaded by them, yet they will repeat that they cannot control them, and therefore cannot help them. The simple fact remains that thought can be controlled.

Professor Huxley once defined genius as a mind under perfect control—a servant always at heel, ready at any call to do its duty, and quick to respond to any demand that the will can legitimately make upon it. The process of education itself is nothing more nor less than the art of controlling and disciplining the thought. We need to learn on what subjects to fix our thought, within what limits to confine it, how best to render it available; and education affords us precisely this discipline. And so it is in the Christian life: we must begin by the discipline of the thought. We must steadfastly refuse to think evil, and must set our minds by resolute effort toward good. We must gather up each delicate fibre of imagination and fancy, and weave it into the fabric of our religion, and

we can only do so by the most sedulous and unwearying vigilance.

It was the sense of the supreme urgency of this duty that produced the monastic life, with its methodical apportionment of time, its series of duties and devotions, its vigils and its matins, its rigid laws of occupation which filled up every interstice of life with thoughts and ideals that made for spirituality. It was the urgency of this need that made Wesley say, "Never be unemployed, and never be triflingly employed"; and which made him condemn mere reverie as intellectual idleness and waste of moral force. And without being monks or recluses we need the application of this monastic discipline to our thoughts. We must make the attempt in some form to hold them in bounds, or all that is accomplished by the devotion of the Sabbath will be undone by the license of the week. Just as genius is the mind under perfect control, equipped for any task, vigilant for any call of duty, so Christian saintship is the mind and soul under the absolute control of Christ, and ready to respond on the instant to any appeal that He may make. Every thought is brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

But, thirdly, we need to ask by what means this captivity of thought may be gained? We may answer the question by asking another—What is the nature of that force which alone can control a man's thought with any adequacy, or can give him an impulse and mandate for its discipline? The only captivity which thought endures is the captivity

of the ideal. Every man has some ideal, and his ideal is the governing factor in his thought. We have seen that thoughts are not random and elusive, as we often suppose them to be: that they fall as truly under the laws of cause and effect as the blossom on the bough, the fruit upon the tree. Or, to use a correcter figure, we may say that they have centres and orbits; they cohere toward the master-thought as steel filings to the magnetic bar; they move in fixed courses as the stars move on measurable and mathematic roads. We have all heard that curious story of recent astronomy, which relates the fortunes of Algol, which has been called the Demon star, because of the inexplicable variations in its brilliancy. At last those eccentricities have been explained, and have resolved themselves into a starry order; for we know now that Algol revolves round a centre we cannot see, and all its movements are regulated by this unseen and unsuspected centre. So we may say, find the centre of a man's thoughts, and you have the explication of his life. The orbit of his life is absolutely ruled by his central ideal, and is held to it by an invincible moral gravitation.

Is Christ, then, the real centre of our moral movement, the true Sun and Pivot of our life? Are we swept onward in all our thoughts and acts by the stream of force that radiates from Him, so that the orbit and circumference of our lives describe a circle drawn by His hand, and beyond which we cannot move? This is the law of spiritual gravitation.

Inevitably, almost unconsciously, our thoughts own His compulsion, our imagination and fancy reflect Him, our entire faculty is attracted to Him; so that every thought has a thread of diviner light running through it, and is tempered by a spirit that is sweeter and nobler than our own. We see the process in St. Paul himself. Christ constrained him, so that he knew nothing among men but Christ and Him crucified. His mind and life perfectly mirrored his Lord's, for in him every thought was literally brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

There is a lovely picture of Fra Angelico's under which the painter has inscribed, "*Painted at rest—praying.*" Those who see the picture have no difficulty in believing the inscription. In the art of Fra Angelico there is a heavenly atmosphere, a fine lucidity and calm of temper, which we feel as we feel a fragrance. It has been noticed that two other great artists, Titian and Tintoret, in their sacred paintings often leave the face of Christ in shadow, thus betraying to us the temper of reverence in which they did their work. When I looked on the great pictures of these men, this text came to my mind; for here was art, in its every thought and instinct, brought into captivity to Christ. Pictures like these could not have been the product of thought and feeling that was vain and sensual, irreverent or undisciplined; they are the visible expression of manifold powers of thought focussed and fixed on Christ. They were painted at rest—praying. They are profound spiritual aspirations interpreted in form and colour,

and for that reason they beget spiritual aspirations in those who gaze upon them. If these pictures mark the highest point of sacred art, as they do, it is because those who produced them had brought all their art into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

And is there not a very real sense in which we are all artists, engaged in producing, almost unconsciously as regards the final issues, that which will be the true and ultimate expression of our lives? Our thought inevitably colours our life, as the soul of Fra Angelico is revealed in his pictures. What we most need to learn is that which we most frequently forget—that religion is no mere section of our life, but the whole of it. There is no task either so humble or unimportant that its method of performance does not reflect our condition of soul, in our reverence for Christ or our forgetfulness of His temper. And it is so that George Herbert writes :

All may of Thee partake:
Nothing can be so mean,
Which, with this tincture, "*for Thy sake,*"
Will not grow bright and clean.

A servant with this clause
Makes drudgery divine ;
Who sweeps a room as for Thy cause
Makes that and the action fine.

“Whether ye eat or drink,” says St. Paul—thus naming the commonest needs of life, which are no more than necessary accommodations of the flesh—“do it to the glory of God.” And these lowliest duties, these humble fulfilments of the obscurest and least

honourable needs of life, not less than the radiant art of Fra Angelico, may be done in such a spirit as to glorify God. When the thought is sanctified the fountain that feeds all the streams of action is sanctified, and others cannot but take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus.

When the schoolboy begins the tasks of education, what is the first lesson that he has to learn? It is the habit of attention. And what do we mean by that? We mean the ceaseless discipline which fixes the thought upon the task in hand. For do not we remember how in those vanished days of school-life the thought seemed resolute to elude us, and flew off everywhere on wings of its own, and defied recapture? Did we not hear the bird singing in the tree outside the schoolhouse window, and the leaves talking to the breeze, and instantly our thought and fancy vanished into blue distances, and the dry facts of the book that lay before us were utterly forgotten? But gradually we discovered the art of fixing our thought on our task, and knew that there was no learning for us in any other way. Moreover, we discovered, too, that the blue sky was all the bluer, and the green fields all the fresher to us, after the successful effort to master the duty that met us at our desk. We brought our thought into captivity to the obedience of knowledge, and so we grew in wisdom. We must bring our thought into captivity to Christ, and so also shall we grow in grace. Discipline is the very pulse of progress, and to win the battle of goodness, of self-mastery, of

character, demands a harder training than any other battlefield to which this life can call us.

Three final suggestions we may think over at our leisure. First, goodness is a fine art, and is not a matter of magic. Religion is not magical, but reasonable. There is, indeed, a moment of miraculous change that passes over us when we turn from death unto life, as there is for the child when he arrives at birth. But with the child, birth is the beginning of things—not the end. The bundle of immature faculties has to be unravelled, painfully trained, slowly drawn out thread by thread by definite effort, until at last you have the perfect man. It is so with us. We have been swept into a new orbit, but the work of God only begins there, as the child's life only begins when he enters into the heritage of the sunshine and seasonable earth. Whether we ever become Christians worthy of the name, lies with us. It is at least certain that there is no spiritual legerdemain to transform sinners into saints: he who would be a saint must remember that the fine art of being good is the most difficult art in the world, and does not come to a man while he sleeps.

Secondly, the thought is not brought into captivity to Christianity, but to Christ. It is not mere axioms, ethics, beatitudes that save us, but the personal Christ. Christ preached not a doctrine, but Himself. "Other teachers say, Accept my teaching: Christ says, Accept me." The world has had no lack of grave and high moralities, but they have never saved men. Why? Because mere ethics

never do save men : it is passion for a Person who is Himself the summing-up of the ethic and its supreme example, that alone can give vitality to the ethic. Men adore not maxims, but men. It is not the Veda, the Koran, the Gospel that attracts men : it is Buddha, Mohammed, Jesus. Love to Christ is the beginning and end of everything, "and every one that loveth is born of God and knoweth God."

Lastly, learn to recognise the vast scope of the Christian religion. What is the scope ? It is boundless. I cannot measure its orbit, its firmament, or its horizon. It sweeps into its influence, not a part of human nature, but the whole : it claims no tithe of life, but everything. At the close of a modern dream we read of a fair land where only love and truth and justice are supreme. What is that land ? The reply is, Heaven. Where is it ? It is on earth. When is it ? It is in the future. So we look for a kingdom of God which is with men, but if we ask, When will it come ? the sole reply is : When we get rid of formal Christianity and find Christ : when we recognise that forms are worthless and the spirit is everything : when every Christian is a man of whom it may be said, that all his thoughts are brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

AUTHORITY IN RELIGION

"And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at His doctrine ; for He taught with authority, and not as the scribes."

MATTHEW vii. 28, 29.

AUTHORITY IN RELIGION

THERE are two words in these verses which are familiar but not popular words—and as such are commonly treated with contempt or neglect. Christ taught *a doctrine*, and he taught it with *authority*: we often think it a sign of intellectual tolerance to reject doctrine, and of masculine emancipation to revolt against authority. There is a period in life—through which many of us have passed—when the sense of unbounded liberty affords an almost intoxicating joy. As the mind expands, we recognise the fair fronts of numerous philosophies, and we feel like one invited to a rich feast, where he can choose for himself among a hundred dainties. To the ardent youth, first one teacher is a power, and then another; he is attracted by the brilliance of this writer, or the calm unquestioning certainty of that; he picks up from the newspaper or the romance theories of life and conduct, which fascinate him by their novelty, or interest him by their audacity; and amid them all he feels the exquisite freedom of one whose choice has yet to be made, and who can choose as he will. There is no more delightful pastime than framing programmes of life.

When the sense of having a life to live is fresh within us, we lose every other thought in the happiness of that unbounded freedom of choice and range of opportunity which is ours. And it is then that we resent the word "doctrine," and still more the word "authority." They are like the clanging of a heavy bell, which drowns with its iron reverberations the silver chime of hope and liberty. Doctrines are for schoolmen, authority is for slaves: so we say and think, and we suppose ourselves both wise and clever in the saying.

But surely it needs no special keenness of vision to see that doctrine is merely the formal summing-up of essential truth, and that authority is the main-spring of any well-ordered world. When I believe in the law of gravitation, it is a doctrine that I believe; when I teach the schoolboy a problem in mathematics, it is an authority I invoke. The world is not a place where all things are equally right or true; nor have I the privilege to accept as right or true whatever I may wish. Black is black, and white is white: these are primary distinctions, which no art can confuse. There is such a thing as truth, and it is my first business, as an intelligent creature, to discover it. The real business of the world through all the centuries has been to collect and tabulate the things which are indisputable, and leave them as a growing hoard to those who come after. The world is not a series of booths at a fair, at which a hundred various religions and philosophies display their wares, all equally beautiful and good,

among which I may choose as I will, and thus piece together for myself a plan of life: it is a great school where certain things are proved, and where the proved thing is taught. It is too late in the day to dispute Euclid or ignore the discovery of Newton: these matters have passed beyond conjecture into the realm of ascertained knowledge. We do not begin to teach geography by saying, "Here is a map of the world that the Romans drew": we say, "Here is a globe containing what the greatest Roman never suspected—an America he never heard of, an Africa of whose vast circumference he never dreamed"; and we teach our doctrine with authority, the authority of proven truth. To object to these teachings because they come to us in the form of a doctrine; to say I will believe in no America I have not seen; to dispute the fairness of an authority which speaks out of the accumulated wisdom of the ages, would be the merest moonshine madness: for, free as we are, we are not free to dispute the authority of truth, except in a madhouse where the very elements of reason are dissolved.

This, then, is the position of Christ in the realm of moral truth: He teaches with authority. He gives us an invulnerable basis for a good life. Whosoever hears and does His teaching will build for himself a life and character which shall be stable as a house built upon a rock. He will be lifted above the floods of conjecture, and will stand secure amid the loosened hurricanes of doubt. Christ gives us a plan of life such as no scribe ever gave. He speaks with the

calm certainty of the spiritual discoverer, who announces proved conclusions. He teaches us to do precisely what He has done, and we shall then become what He is : as if Newton or Euclid should put in our hands the proof of their discoveries, and ask us to verify them by working them out for ourselves. He teaches a doctrine—a doctrine He lived ; He teaches it with authority, because He has proved it true by living it ; and a doctrine so certified cannot fail to be authoritative.

This passage opens up, then, the great question of authority in religion. What are we to believe ? Why are we to believe ? Is the pulpit the mere mouthpiece of certain personal and debatable opinions ? Is the truth of Christ's sayings equally a matter of opinion ? I cannot hope to answer all these profound questions ; but I can at least indicate what the answer should be.

Now, in the first place, authority is an admitted principle in human affairs. No man is born into a limitless freedom. For years he is under the authority of his parents, and for years more under the authority of schoolmasters. We are not required to construct for ourselves a creed out of our own poor personal acquaintance with things ; we seek the wise man, and we learn of him. We recognise that there are men in the world who are qualified to be our teachers and governors and rulers, and the constant need of society is to discover these men. You may be as democratic as you please, but you do not, cannot, and ought not to wish to displace from his

God-given task of ruling, the man qualified to rule. The reason why democracies so often end in autocracy is, that the human soul craves authority, and is willing to yield boundless obedience to the man who is qualified to receive it. Who has not often felt that the noblest form of government is government by the one wise and strong man, if only you can find him? Who has not felt, in his own personal perplexities, that if he could find the one truly wise teacher he would gladly become as a little child, and submit himself to the authority of such an one? It is one of the great inherent needs of human nature that is expressed in such a wish. Israel, when it asked for a king, felt the need: England, when it offered supreme power to Cromwell, felt the need: France, in the strange perturbations of her political history, has again and again expressed her craving for authority: the disciples felt it when they called Christ Master, and we English people have shown the same passionate belief in authority when, as has so often happened, great multitudes have followed some prophet of the day, and have yielded to him their undivided loyalty and service. Granted the man who is worthy of authority, and there will always be the disciples ready to his hand, for authority is the very keynote of order and progress.

But if we need authority in secular things, still more do we need it in the supreme matters of the soul and in its search for truth. It was a saying of Lessing's, that if he were asked to choose between Truth and the Search for Truth, he would choose

the latter; but such a condition of mind is very far from being common. The average man craves the satisfaction of certainty. He is ill at ease while he doubts. And nothing is clearer than that even the strongest and most self-contained of men finds himself weak and incapable in the presence of the vast problems of the soul. Need I recall cases; need I give illustrations? It would be hard to discover any man of more confident dogmatism, any man more capable of being both law and impulse to himself than Carlyle; yet more than once there is wrung from those stern lips the cry, "Oh, that I had faith —oh, that I had it!" No man has spoken with more prophetic force to his generation than Ruskin, yet even he has said in a memorable passage: "Oh, that some one had but told me, in my youth, when all my heart seemed to be set on those colours and clouds that appear for a little while and then vanish away, how little my love of them would serve me when the silence of lawn and wood in the dews of morning should be completed, and all my thoughts should be of those whom, by neither, I was to meet more."

No two men have spoken more confidently from the standpoint of science than Darwin and Huxley: yet the one can only speak of himself as hopelessly perplexed in face of the vague probabilities of immortality, and the other has said that if he could find any one who could wind up his nature like a clock, and guarantee that it should always act rightly, he would gladly give up his soul to such a beneficent

custody and control. Now, think of these speeches, and think of all that they imply. There have been no greater men in our generation than these four. Each is supreme in his own domain, and is honoured for his wisdom. Each is of that noble order of men whom Huxley himself has finely described as "the thought-worn chieftains of the mind." Yet each in turn confesses that all his knowledge fails before the Infinite; that the deepest need of the soul is for a supreme authority; and that to any one justified in the exercise of that authority he would yield all. Is there anything in literature more significant than this? Is there any possible exposition of the need for authority in life that could be so clear, so moving, so profoundly convincing as this?

Or let us apply the lesson to ourselves, and speak out of our own sorrowful experience. Who has not doubted? Who has not suffered the agony of a great perplexity? Who has not faced the mystery of death and the grave, and felt that it would be worth all the kingdoms of the world to know—to know by some actual, ghostly, solemn experience if needs be—the reality of a life beyond all we see? Who has not sent the cry wailing up into the bosom of the great shadow that darkens the world:

O Christ! that it were possible
For one short hour to see
The souls we loved, that they might tell us
What and where they be!

We could welcome in such a moment the unearthly visitor who unsealed the secret of the grave. We

would stretch our hands out to those hands of shadow in infinite gratitude, if a voice would but speak and reassure us. And if we could but find the man who knew, who spoke with the clear accent of one who has passed beyond perplexity, and extorted from the hidden world its message—who would not hail this man as the prophet of the Lord? All our modern traffic with Buddhism and Spiritualism, our talk of Mahatmas and ghosts, is but another evidence that our souls are a masterless kingdom waiting for a ruler, and that we are in search of authority.

Now, there are two answers commonly given to that appeal: the one is the authority of human reason, the other of the Church. But we have already seen that reason is insufficient, in the examples of Carlyle and Ruskin, Darwin and Huxley. Nor can the authority of the Church be admitted, for instantly we ask, what Church? Is it the Greek Church, the Roman Church, the English Church? If the custody of truth belongs to any one Church, we are told it probably belongs to the most ancient, and that is the Roman. I can understand the cogency of that reply. I can understand the motives and processes of thought that led to the recantation of Newman. I can understand why it is that, ever and again in our day, men and women turn away from the perplexities of rival creeds and contending claims, and take refuge in Catholicism. It is the last refuge of despair. Catholicism says to the perplexed: "My child, doubt no more. Cease to think, and I will think for you: resign yourself, and I will tell you what to obey: believe in the infallible

authority of a Church that is the age-long custodian of truth, and you shall find rest to your soul." And if I could admit that claim I should have to be a Catholic. If I believed that any Church could possess this authority, I should be bound to submit myself to this most ancient of authorities. If I had trained myself to think of any ecclesiastical organisation as the only fountain of truth (as Newman did), and had then discovered that its credentials were false (as he believed they were), I should act as he did, and seek rest in the one ancient Church which could show the strongest probability for the truth of its claims. From Newman's point of view, his action was entirely intelligible, and even inevitable.

But I do not believe this. What is a Church but a company of fallible men, and what is there in their united expression of opinion better worth credence than in their separate and personal opinions? Who is to tell me which creed is right, and which council, among the many councils that have bitterly attacked one another, has the authority I seek? No; the truth is not in any creed or any Church: it is in Christ alone. It is not in Peter or Paul: it is in Christ. If He was what He said He was, if He was the Teacher sent of God, then the one indestructible basis of truth and authority is in His own words. If Newman had believed less in the Church and more in Christ, he would never have become a Catholic. If we are to find final authority anywhere, it must be in Christ's plain teaching, which all can understand; and it was the supreme claim of Christ, and His

justification of that claim, which men instinctively felt and recognised, when they said: "He taught with authority, and not as the scribes."

So, then, I implore you to mark this, for it is of supreme importance—the one eternal authority for the soul is not the Church, but the living Christ. There was another man, a far greater and deeper man than Newman, who was hard pressed by the same perplexities, but who found his way out of them in a nobler fashion. When Martin Luther put his hand upon the Bible, and said, "On this I take my stand: I cannot retract," the intellectual and spiritual emancipation of Europe began. He said, significantly, that he could do no other: no, because he had found that the authority of reason and of the Church were alike vain. And Puritanism went further still, when it declared by the mouth of one of its greatest sons, that there was yet more light to break out of God's holy Word, and when it learned to have faith in the Christ alone, who is alive for evermore, to guide the souls of men into all truth. He is still the one authority for perplexed souls. Whosoever will submit himself to the full impact of Christ's teaching, receiving His words in their plain meaning, and acting upon them with loyal obedience and uncompromising sincerity, will find that He spoke nothing more than truth when He said, "My words are spirit, and my words are life." To submit to any other authority, either of Church or priest, is simply intellectual suicide. To submit to the living Christ is to enter into an ever-enlarging heritage of glorious

liberty : for He teaches with authority, and not as the scribes.

And so we come to a second and simpler question : What are we to believe ? The reply is, Christ's doctrine. Do we want the void in the heart filled, as Carlyle did, and all the tangled threads of our thinking drawn together into a perfect whole ? Christ gives us His truth. Do we desire to know the things that alone will prove best worth our knowing when life passes into the shadows, as Ruskin did ? Christ tells us the things that are for our peace. Do we wish that we could be wound up like a clock, so that we may always act rightly, as Huxley did ? Christ promises us His indwelling, and furnishes us with the Sermon on the Mount as the perfect code of conduct, in obedience to which the perfect life can be lived. Even John Stuart Mill said that he could imagine no higher guide to noble and magnanimous conduct than that a man should ask of his intentions and his conduct, "Would Christ have done this, or acted thus ?" We may need creeds to put into succinct form our intellectual conceptions of truth, but there is no authority in creeds. We may need Churches as the organism of our corporate life and spiritual activity, but there is no Church, and never was, and never will be, that has the right to claim any final authority over the consciences of men. What do all the inveterate feuds and mean jealousies of our organised Christian life spring from but the fatal and incurable passion of this or that Church to claim supreme authority ? What would St. Paul have said

of one knot of clerics denying the orders of another, and insulting them with studied contempt, or at least refusing them any true equality of brotherhood, when all the time they sing the same hymns, and preach the same essential truths, and profess to adore and serve the one Lord ? What would Christ have thought of men, otherwise good and noble in spirit, who attached supreme importance to the position of an altar, or the colour of a cope, or the tradition of an apostolic succession, making these trumpery opinions the justification for denouncing as schismatics men who are one with them in a passion for the Redeemer, and who show their true faith in Christ by lives devoted to His service ? I say again, that all the fearful errors of the Church, both in temper and conduct, the persecutions and martyrdoms and violent animosities of contending sects, the acts of cruel injustice and arbitrary power and hateful rancour which disgrace the page of history, and poison the ecclesiastical atmosphere of to-day, have arisen solely from the delusion that the Church is the fountain of authority, and not the living and ever-blessed Christ. It is not the Church that we are called upon to obey, but His doctrine. It is not to any council of human scholars we own allegiance, but to Him. And we may say of Christ in the moral world, as Ruskin has said of man in the physical world : "The fire of his wonderful heart is the only light and heat worth gauge and measure. Where he is are the tropics ; where he is not, the ice-world." For Christ is the

way, the truth, and the life, and to obey Him is life eternal.

What is His doctrine, then? It is contained in the Sermon on the Mount, in His words and parables, and in the profoundly original view of life which His own conduct enforced. But there are omissions in the Sermon on the Mount, aspects of life that are not even suggested? True: it is as wonderful for what it does not say as for what it does. But we have Genesis, and the Prophets, and the Apostles; and what of these? These also contain ennobling expositions of truth, and are intimately related to truth, but Christ's doctrine is His own word. It sums up all that the Prophets and Apostles say, as the diamond sums up the carbon and the water. Let any man truly take the Sermon on the Mount for his guide, let him live in its spirit, and let him administer all his affairs according to its doctrine, and he will find it sufficient for every need. Oh! that we could attain this great simplification of religion, which would come if we once took the plain words of Christ for our absolute authority. Oh! that we could live in the spirit which Charles Dickens desired for his children when he wrote in his will: "*I exhort my dear children humbly to try to guide themselves by the reading of the New Testament in its broad spirit, and to put no faith in any man's narrow construction of its letter here or there.*" Surely this is what Paul spoke of as the simplicity of Christ, from which he feared his converts had departed; and until we all accept these clear and flawless definitions of the perfect life

given us in the Sermon on the Mount, until we consent to combine upon the essentials of religion, and leave the accidentals, taking the plain words of Christ and not the word of either man or the Church for our sole authority, we shall never reach that great reunion of Christendom under the one Shepherd which Christ desired, and for which the noblest souls still pray and wait in vain.

One other thing remains to be said, which has already been indicated. If the doctrine of Christ is true, then we have no choice but to submit to the authority of truth. We are not at liberty to deny truth which we do not wish to accept; if a thing is truth, it is our solemn duty to believe it. Religion is not a matter of opinion, but of supreme conviction. There is an ignorance which is culpable and damnable, and it is of this wilful contempt of witnessed truth that Christ solemnly said: "He that believeth not shall be condemned!" Broadly stated, for all honest men belief must needs follow conviction of truth. To be convinced of truth, and not to act upon it, is to outrage the soul, to tamper with the moral consciousness, to slit the veins and let the moral life ebb away. It is this vitiating insincerity which in every age has brought religion into contempt, and the spectacle of which has led shrewd critics of the ecclesiastical life of our own day to exclaim that the Christianity of Christ has not yet been tried. Such insincerity carries with it its own punishment: the light that is in us becomes darkness, so that the truths that were once divine to us cease at last to

affect us, and men who in the freshness of their youth felt the attraction of Christ and the compulsion of truth, in middle-age find the Gospels closed to them ; or, if they ever dare to think of them, think of them only to resent what they call their impossible ideal of life, and to explain it away. There is no sadder spectacle, no deeper tragedy. And behind the public function of preaching there lies—to the preacher at least—the bitter memory of what that tragedy means, both for himself and others. It gives an unspeakable solemnity to the act of preaching ; for if the preacher is responsible for the uncompromising exposition of truth, the hearer is responsible for hearing it.

Let us once more honestly face those professed beliefs for the expression of which a Church is organised. What is it we seek ? We seek an intelligible basis of life and conduct—the way to a perfect life. Where do we profess to find this life ? In faithful discipleship of Jesus Christ, whom we call Master. Are we such disciples ? For behold he that heareth and *doeth* these sayings of Christ shall be likened to a “man who built his house upon a rock : and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell not, for it was founded on a rock.” O heedless soul of mine ! listen, listen and obey : for this Man speaks as never man spake : He teaches with authority and not as the scribes.

THE SUBURBS OF SODOM

Q

J

"And Lot pitched his tent toward (R.V. moved his tent
as far as) Sodom."—GEN. xiii. 12.

THE SUBURBS OF SODOM

TO read the book of Genesis is to watch the beginnings of the human race and the growth of the human conscience. How fresh and perfect is the charm of these stories, how dramatic and inevitable their lessons! Well might so true a poet as Alexander Smith say of them, that he breathed the morning air of the world as he read, and witnessed, as though with his own eyes, the outgoings and ingoings of the patriarchs, and heard across brawling centuries of blood and war the bleating of Abraham's flocks in the half-peopled world, and the tinkling of the bells of Rebekah's camels in the green pastoral quiet. He who does not read his Bible knows nothing of literature : he who despises it can only be excused on the ground of an invincible ignorance that knows not what it does.

Now, among all the stories of Genesis none is better worth moral consideration than the history of Lot.

The story of Lot may be described as an epitome of life. Just as evolution asserts that in the structure of man every type of created life is represented, so it may be said that every man

epitomises in himself all the moral forces that make the tragedy or triumph of life. The passing of thousands of years makes absolutely no difference to the problem: the story of Lot is as human, as real, as vital, as though it happened yesterday; and, indeed, there is no day when it is not being re-acted in human lives. Lot was offered a choice in life, and he chose wrongly—with what a harvest of disastrous consequences we all know. To us also come solemn hours of choice, when a destiny depends upon the decision of an instant. Lot obeyed an inclination rather than a principle; we also are under the constant temptation to guide our course by the lower rather than the higher dictates of our nature. It is only in such terrible hours of choice that the true bias of our nature is apt to reveal itself, just as no one suspects the bias in the ball until it is set rolling. And the bias does not count for much when the ball begins to move: it is not until the distance grows that we perceive what the goal will be. That is the real significance of this story of Lot, and surely, for the youth who has the making or unmaking of life in his hands, there can be no story more deserving of studious scrutiny. When Lot turned his back on Abraham he left the best traditions of his life behind him; when he pitched his tent toward Sodom he had put his foot upon the long slope of that precipitous descent which found its end in moral bankruptcy and ruin. Now let us study this story, and let me attempt to render it in modern form and phrase.

First, I ask : What is there in Lot himself to explain this disastrous choice ? For the first thing to remember is, that the explanation of the foolish deeds of men never lies in circumstances, but in themselves. We are constantly attempting to put the blame of our folly on circumstance, on fate, on environment ; but the plea is inadmissible, for man is the architect of circumstance, and fate is but the shadow of character, and environment is pretty much the mould of habit. We have to look deeper for the determining cause of human action, and we find it in what we call Principle. The Puritans had a principle which they called the fear of God, and when tremendous issues suddenly rose and pressed for decision, they were decided by the application of that principle, and it made them the masters of England. The armies of England have had one controlling principle through hundreds of years of vicissitude—a reverence for duty ; and in those great crises when the empire depended on our arms, it has been the application of that great principle which has wrought national salvation. We see in daily life, do we not, that the great difference between man and man is the possession or lack of principle ? All the moral outfit of some men is a bundle of loose and ill-considered opinions, and when great decisions are forced on such men they always fail. The moral outfit of other men is some supreme principle—absolute belief in God, or truth, or purity, or duty ; and when the hour of trial comes they simply act in accordance with this passionately

conceived principle, and act nobly, greatly, heroically. And that was the great difference between Abraham and Lot. Abraham had a sure hold on one great truth, that worldly success was as nothing to the favour of God, and righteousness of character was everything. Lot was an opportunist, who had no great faith in God, but a strong conviction that wealth was the one thing best worth having; and the character of each man is absolutely reflected in his fate.

He pitched his tent toward Sodom. The action explains the man. Abraham magnanimously gave him the first choice, and this was his choice. He could not have been wholly ignorant of the reputation of Sodom, but he was in no mood to remember it. He saw the rich, fertile plain, the magnificent opportunities for aggrandisement it afforded, and he conveniently overlooked the character of its inhabitants. He had a keen eye for his worldly interests, but no sense whatever of his spiritual interests. He was misled by his avarice, and sacrificed his higher interests to the lower. He had no sentimental views about Canaan such as Abraham had: the plain of Sodom was a Promised Land good enough for him. If there was any moral risk in choosing Sodom, he was prepared to take it. What could the bare hills of Canaan afford that was in any way equal to this watered plain, green and fertile as the garden of the Lord? So Abraham moved his tent to the oaks of Mamre, and built God an altar there. Lot, rejoicing in his good fortune,

and chuckling over the senile folly of Abraham, moved down into the doomed plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom.

And the choice of Lot is a choice that is being perpetually repeated. Men are always sacrificing their spiritual to their earthly interests. They will leave a church where all that is best in them has been begotten and nourished, and move to some country house, far from the influence of Christian teaching, where their children grow up pagans, and the Sabbath is a day of utter idleness ; and though they know it not, it is pitching their tent toward Sodom. They will enter on forms of business which they know to be full of moral risk, simply because they can make money a little faster in them, and they are willing to take the risk of Sodom for a little gold. They will let their daughters marry men whose character will not bear inspection, merely for the sake of the worldly advantages they secure, and will cheerfully pitch their tents near any Sodom where bank-books grow thicker as souls grow smaller. I am perpetually being asked such questions as these by young men : Ought I to remain in a business where I am expected daily to tell lies and cheat to please my master ? It is a custom in this or that trade to practise some miserable deceit inspired by covetousness : Ought I to do it ? When a man asks whether he ought, he is already convinced in his own mind that he ought not. No man ought to barter his self-respect, his honesty, his integrity, for any possible reward that this world may offer. No price

that the world can pay him can ever recompense him for that betrayal. Better a crust of bread and a good conscience, than all the gold of all the world, if it be smeared with the slime of Sodom. Better the most sterile hills of Canaan and the bleak oaks of Mamre, than all the fertility of the plain over which Gomorrah exhales the steam of moral poison. The first, the last, and indeed the only duty of a man in this world is to do right. You may buy your Sodom too dear; indeed, no man ever yet bought evil at a cheap rate. Sin is the most expensive of all human indulgences, and that Lot discovered when he fled to Zoar, a bankrupt, dishonoured, and disgraced old man. Many things may be uncertain in this life, but there is one thing absolutely indisputable, and that is, that sin is always punished, and Sodom is a ruinous bargain at any price.

But you will observe that Lot's choice involves more than a sacrifice of spiritual interests to worldly advantages; it implies a laxity of virtue in himself. There was something in the very atmosphere of this fertile, sun-saturated plain that a man of robust virtue would have dreaded. It is a matter of observation, on which the world is agreed, that where Nature is most bountiful, man is morally at his weakest. The perfect climate means the most imperfect men. It is where man has to battle most strenuously with Nature that manhood is most noble. It needs the wildness of Scotch glens to breed Covenanters, the mountain gloom and glory to train the Swiss patriot, the daily struggle with

hostile and inhospitable Nature to develop the forces that make for civilisation. In the languorous air of the tropics the moral forces seem to drain themselves away, and where the earth gives everything without labour, man is most vile, most impotent for good, most thoroughly the slave of his animal desires. Do not indulge in effeminate vituperation of the harsh winds and grey skies of England; they have bred men. Do not covet the "cerulean vacancy" of Italian skies, the enervating warmth of southern shores, for there manhood perishes.

And surely, as we ponder such a truth, before the least imaginative of us there rises a vision of the moral equivalent of Sodom which allures each of us. Shall I paint my vision? Shall I interpret my parable? Behold, then, the Sodom that is at your door. It has soft winds, and perilous fragrance, and fatal beauty. It is the realm of passion, of desire, of impurity. It has a magic in the air which dulls the conscience, and sets the pulse of youth beating with delirious vehemence. It has a wizardry beneath which moral fibre withers, an allurement before which the reason is vanquished. And I see on all sides youths who leave the sunny hills of life, where the air is clear and sweet, and go down into its fatal plains. Here is the youth whose mind is quickened by a prurient curiosity for shameful things, and whose talk already has the accent of Sodom in it. Here is he who rakes amid the garbage of literature that he may discover the novel or story that ministers most keenly to his morbid fancies.

Here are those who have no taste for the book that feeds the soul, or the play that purifies and invigorates the imagination, but seek out only the drama that treads nearest to the verge of indecency, and the book that is the lightest froth of the scum that rises in the cauldron of a corrupt society. They have pitched their tents toward Sodom. They have turned from the buoyant, bracing atmosphere, in which character is bred and heroism thrives, to the languorous air in which resistance to evil is rare and difficult.

I know not whether any such hear these words, but I know there is a door opening into Sodom from every life. I know that the road to Sodom is a beaten road, all too easily discovered. It is the road Christ spoke of—broad and thronged, and it leads to destruction. Men do not take it at a bound ; they approach it by stages. They begin by harbouring unclean thoughts, by poisoning the imagination, by stimulating the dormant passions into activity. They pitch their tents daily, yearly, nearer to the fatal city, that rises in its evil splendour :

A wilderness of spires, and crystal pile
Of rampart upon rampart, dome on dome,
Ilimitable range of battlement
On battlement, and the imperial height
Of canopy o'er-canopied.

They know not it is the city of perdition, they know not the dead are there, and that its chambers open upon hell. O brother ! pause—think ! Measure where your desires are leading you, gauge the move-

ment of your thought, for they who enter this city come out no more, and over its portals is written the fiery doom : "All hope abandon ye who enter here."

You will judge if I exaggerate. You who know something of life will also judge whether there is no need to speak plainly on these matters. And mark, I do not speak at this moment of the men who have actually entered Sodom, who have thrown away purity, and faith, and chivalry ; but only of the method by which men reach that final tragedy. They pitch their tents toward Sodom. They look with callous compliance on its corruption. The vehement abhorrence of vice which every pure man feels has gone out of them. They tolerate sin ; they inspect it, they analyse it, they are in company with it ; they do everything but abhor it. And even if they never enter Sodom, is this nothing ? Has the dissolute thought no penalty as well as the dissolute act ? Is there no corresponding coarsening and corruption of the nature, no debasement of soul, for the man who connives at evil, even if he does not commit it ? No, be sure of it—you cannot touch pitch and not be defiled ; you cannot set up the tent toward Sodom without a loss of moral virility, a deterioration of soul, a certain vitiation of character ; and it scarcely needs an apostle to assure us that evil communications corrupt good manners.

But perhaps some one says : "Surely it is possible to live in contiguity to Sodom and not share its evil ?" That is not the point at all. No wise man spends his time in calculating how close he can walk

to a precipice, how much poison he can imbibe without death. The duty of the wise man and true Christian is not to see how far he can reconcile himself with evil, but how best he can destroy it. Virtue is nothing if it is not intolerant of vice, and uncompromising in resisting it. The Christian is bound to agitate and struggle for the overthrow of evil. He will not dare to do in Sodom as Sodom does. It was compromise that ruined Lot, and the man who employs himself in inventing ingenious compromises with sin is pretty sure, sooner or later, to find that compromise with evil means subjugation to it.

And this, as you know, was actually the fate of Lot. We have no intermediate history given us, but from the materials that lie in common human experience it is easy to sketch the stages of his deterioration. We hear him arguing with himself, as men still argue, that it will be much better for his interests to live a little nearer Sodom, and it need in no wise mean that he will become as the Sodomites. We see him coveting such gains as Sodom can lavishly bestow. We watch the fine pastoral simplicity of the man wear away, the bloom of innocence in his children disappear, his sense of the authority of conscience dwindle down, his view of evil become daily more lenient as he lives in closer proximity to it; just as a man who, when he is first wrenched from the clean air of some distant village, and thrust into some stifling city slum, feels suffocated, but in a year becomes used to its fetid atmosphere,

and last of all insensible to its corruption. Lot thought he could live in the suburbs of Sodom and still retain the simplicity of a patriarch ; but it was impossible. Men still think they can live in the suburbs of sin, and go no further : it is equally impossible. You cannot stop an avalanche when once it has begun to move. You cannot say of sin, "I will go so far, and no further." Evil is a declivity on which when men once begin to slide there is small chance of stopping at will. The bias declares itself. The lack of principle that made Lot willing to risk the demoralisation of the plain at all, for the sake of temporal advantage, made him ready before long to go further, and become a citizen of Sodom. The man who harbours a corrupt thought has already fitted himself to commit a corrupt act. The man who is willing to connive at sin is but a short step removed from sharing it. O brothers ! young men—you who, in the shop, the bank, the office, in the perilous leisure of lonely hours, in the thronged comradeship of daily activity, are daily tempted to lower your moral standard, to speak lightly of sins which you are not yet corrupt enough to commit, to pitch the tent toward Sodom, as interested spectators of sin at least, and in no way as its accusers, its enemies, its judges—believe me, such an attitude is impossible. It cannot be maintained. You cannot serve God and Mammon. The very nature of life itself coerces us out of compromise, and forces choice upon us. You can go with Abraham to the altar of Mamre, or with Lot to

citizenship and participation in all the abominable sins of Sodom, but to halt midway is not possible ; and through every conscience peals the eternal voice : "I set before you life and death, blessing and cursing. Choose ye this day which ye will serve."

The retribution that fell on Lot was swift, terrible, and tragic. In no drama ever written by the genius of man is there so overwhelming a climax as the last chapters in the history of Lot. Here is the outline : look at it, consider it, and say whether compromise with sin is possible. His daughters married to vicious husbands, who jest at him when he warns them of the coming doom ; he himself feebly expostulating against an outrage so abominable that it is unspeakable, and proposing in its place one still worse and more unnatural ; his home ruined, his possessions swept away, his wife overwhelmed in the fiery hail and volcanic ash of the great upheaval—a poor, broken, pitiable old man, without a single consolation of conscience or affection, he flees to the mountains he never should have left, and the ineradicable taint of Sodom travels with him in his daughters, whose names have become infamous, and whose progeny were the enemies of God. He who has looked on Pompeii can picture the physical aspects of the scene ; he alone who knows the human heart can measure its spiritual tragedy ; and when all is told, the tenderest-hearted will feel that it had been a mercy if Lot also had perished under that flaming sleet of judgment, and his name had

thus been lost for ever in the indiscriminate destruction of the Cities of the Plain.

Such a concrete retribution we can measure, because it appeals to our imagination. But let us not forget that the daily retrIBUTions of impurity that happen round us are not less terrible. Wholesale judgments tarry ; personal judgments are always going on :

The mills of God grind slowly, but they grind exceeding small ;

Though with patience He stands grinding, with exactness grinds He all.

I will not speak now of those inevitable retrIBUTions of physical justice which overtake the impure and unchaste, for the story of Lot rather indicates the less visible, but not less dreadful, *moral* consequences of evil. Consider alone the one fact I have already alluded to, that Lot and his family were wholly and unalterably corrupted by their connection with Sodom. Let us grant that of which we have no evidence—that Lot was actuated by the best motives in the world, that he possibly persuaded himself that he could do good by becoming a citizen of Sodom, that he actually kept clear of any active participation in the vices of the city, and endeavoured to do his business with a true desire for uprightness : let us give him credit for all this, and still the fact remains, that the taint of Sodom had saturated him and his, as men who sojourn in a jungle absorb at every pore the deadly malaria of the swamps. And so I say that the youth who makes comrades of the

sons and daughters of Sodom cannot escape the taint of Sodom. And you cannot lose it. The book, the song, the jest, the spectacle, the play that feeds the impure thought, cannot be dismissed at will. It leaves its germ of poison in the heart, and years cannot destroy it. And, beyond this, every one knows but too well that sins of thought ripen into action, and that what a man thinks and imagines, in some moment of weakened will and strong temptation he is almost sure to do.

There is no more powerful passage in modern fiction than a scene in a book* which is just now exciting wide attention, in which a man who has dwelt in Sodom in his younger days tries in vain to win the woman who could and would have loved him had he been the pure man she believed he was :

“ You would have loved me, then, if I had lived a different life ? ” he said.

“ Yes,” she answered simply, “ I should have loved you. You were born for me. Why, oh why, did you not live for me ? ”

“ I wish to God I had,” he answered.

“ You meant to marry always,” she said. “ You treasured in your heart your ideal of a woman. Why could you not have lived so that you would have been her ideal too, when at last you met ? ”

“ I wish to God I had,” he repeated.

And that was his retribution—the fiery hail that swept over his life, and left it for ever scorched and

* “ The Heavenly Twins,” by Sarah Grand.

sterile. That is the earthly punishment of the impure: they lose the power of loving, and become unfit for any pure and noble love. O brothers! once more I plead with you: turn from Sodom; follow Him who turned His face steadfastly—not towards Sodom, but the Jerusalem of heroic labours for mankind, and sacrificial death on their behalf. Be true to your best self; have faith in God and right. Be men, be Christians; and in your hearts shall reign the tranquillity of Abraham's faith, not the furies of Lot's despair; and yours shall be the reward of Abraham's righteousness, not the agony of Lot's disastrous retribution.

THE TRIAL BY FIRE

"For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire."—*1 COR. iii. 11-15.*

THE TRIAL BY FIRE

THESE verses are Paul's review of his own work —and, indeed, of the whole work that Christianity was accomplishing within the area of his own observation. As he wrote to the Corinthians, perhaps some memory of the city itself floated before his imagination, and he saw again its marble palaces, its temples and its stadium, its great and costly arrays of architecture; and he saw in all a parable. For, as he had passed up and down the city, he had often observed the mason and builder at work upon some growing fabric, and his quick eye had taken in all the details of foundation and wall, architrave and frieze—the gradual unfolding of design, from the rough blocks that lay buried in the earth, to the marble sculpture that flashed against the sky-line. He had perceived the many elements that went to the making of the whole: the gold, the silver, and the precious stones for adornment, and the more perishable and less valued substances which in one way or other were mingled in the structure. He had perhaps noticed also the careless sculptor, regardful only of the work that was most visible, and scamping the work that lay out of sight;

the dishonest workman, who mixed worthless material in his work ; the man who built without regard for stability, careful only for his wage and his convenience. And to him all this was a parable of what he saw around him in the moral world. Neither the converts nor the preachers of early Christianity were perfect. The one found it easy to plaster over old deficiencies of character with a deceptive morality ; the other, to mix with the essential truth fancies and notions which were as hay or stubble mixed with the gold and costly stones. He did not complain : he recognised that man was imperfect, even at his best, and that folly and wisdom dwelt side by side in every man ; but he realised that there was a solemn final trial when all that was not of truth would perish, and only truth itself would survive. The very Church of Christ itself was a temporary structure—a temple reared for earthly needs, an organisation which would perish when the need for it had passed ; and the one imperishable thing about it was Jesus Christ, the true and one foundation. It was of that solemn hour of testing he reminded himself and his converts ; and he pictured to them the final trial by fire, when only the adamantine elements would remain, and the frail and flimsy rubbish with which men filled up the interstices of character and conduct would be wholly swept away, as though they had not been.

Is it not true that we, like the careless builders of Corinth, are often forgetful of any hour of

trial, of any test by fire? How few of us have ever learned to the point of urgent belief—and religious profession which does not reach that point is vain—that there is truly a day when the secrets of all hearts will be revealed, and in that day truth alone will triumph in the test? It is to teach us the one difficult lesson, that justice and truth, virtue and principle, alone make for final success, that half the great books of the world have been written, and all the great prophets have uttered their message. "If the thing is unjust," said Thomas Carlyle, "thou hast not succeeded: no, not though bonfires blazed from north to south, and bells rang, and editors wrote leading articles, and the just thing lay trampled out of sight, to all mortal eyes an abolished and annihilated thing."

It is easy enough to simulate success, as the builder may who puts his costly stones full in the sun, and hides behind them the lying rubble that will work decay, the hay and stubble that invite the flame. There is many a man whose career seems a manifold success, whose life rises like a stately structure full in the light of day, and wins golden opinions from all sorts of men; who nevertheless has mixed with solid virtues and real elements of nobility so much of evil and moral weakness that it is little better than a hollow cheat. If it became St. Paul to review his own work with the searching and critical eye of one who dared not spare himself by any plausible deceit, how much

more does it become us to review our character, our life, our work? Is it not a wise counsel, that we judge ourselves, that we be not judged; that we examine the structure of our life, and condemn the unworthy elements, that we be not condemned? For there is an hour of test for every man: there is a Calvary of utmost trial towards which all feet move, when in spite of ourselves the quality of our life and its work will be revealed. We know how Christ faced that hour: with what joyous confidence He said that the Prince of this world came and had nothing in Him: no concealed weakness, no flawed spot of character, no worn-out gate of guard or crumbled bastion by which he could carry the assault. O you, who add act to act without thought, who build into your life careless days and sinful hours, who work in the untempered mortar of selfish motives and desires—pause, pause and think a moment: survey your building: search the foundation of your life: for the day of days will declare it, when it shall be searched and tested by fire.

First, then, let us ask, *What is it we each build?* The reply is, *Character*. What is character? It is the slow accretion of habits, acts, and impulses, of morality and emotion, tending toward a final mould, a fixed form. It is the accretion of habit, for we are so constituted that to do a thing once is to desire to do it again, and every act is the preface and preparation for a similar act. It is the work of impulse, for impulse is the glowing

forge in which action is shaped, and it may happen that—

Just this or that poor impulse,
Which for once had play unstifled,
Seems the whole work of a lifetime
Which away the rest has trifled.

It is morality and emotion, for not more surely is the slenderest coloured thread gathered into the loom, or the lightest whisper chronicled on the wax tablet of the phonograph, than is each thrill of hope, each fear or prayer, recorded in the structure of character. There is nothing too little to have its effect on character, and sometimes an effect which seems wholly disproportionate to the cause. It seems a little thing to the dishonest workman yonder to lay a course of bricks that cannot last; but when the wall bulges and the house falls, that score or two of rotten bricks seems anything but a trifle. And so we soothe ourselves in wrong-doing by saying: "It is but a little sin: it is so venial an offence that it cannot matter": forgetting that, in that slowly rising structure of character, every error leaves its mark and finds its record. There is no day when we are not thus building, no hour of the day when we have not done something to strengthen or deface this edifice that God is finally to look upon and measure. This day and in this very moment, something is being done by each of us towards the completion of character, and by our quickened moral sentiment we are building a costly stone into its structure, or by our frivolity

and folly we have added the hay and stubble which the fire will consume.

Does it not follow, then, that character is everything to us: the one real possession which is imperishable? There is a story of a French sculptor who had just finished in a lonely garret of Paris the clay model of his greatest work. He had put his life into his work: it was the concrete expression of all his hope, his thought, his purpose; the ultimatum of his art and genius. It was freezing weather, and he was poor and had no fire. The wind drove in bitter flaws against the window, and whistled through its crevices, and the snow lay hard and deep without. He feared much lest the wet clay should freeze, for then he knew that all his work would be undone. He took off his clothes and wrapped them round the model: and still he was not content. He woke again and again in the night, and touched the model, and could not satisfy himself that it was safe against the frost. Lastly, he took the blankets from his bed, and wrapped them also round his work, and crawled back again to his freezing pallet. And when the morning broke—he was dead. The frost had killed him, but it had spared his work, and that model now stands among the art treasures of Paris, in one of her most famous galleries. And it is so that we should care for character, holding not life dear unto ourselves, if by the sacrifice of life we can save that which is more than life.

This, then, is the first great lesson of these words

of St. Paul. Are there not moments of reflection when the best of us are ready to exclaim : “ For what trifles we live, and what shadows we pursue ! ” For money, for fame, for a little social notoriety, for a notice in a newspaper, or a crumb of flattery from some little coterie, what will not men do ? Even death does not open our eyes ; and we who live, chatter beside the grave of how much this or that man was worth, and what the dimensions of his financial successes may have been. Worth ? There is but one thing worth anything—character : not what a man possessed, but what he was. That alone defies the insolence of death and the havoc of time ; this is the one imperishable thing when all the hay and stubble of a man’s worldly gains are but the ashes of an extinguished fire. Worth ? There is but one standard of worth with God, who measures men by their souls, and not their ledgers. The whole worth of Christianity itself to the world is that it is the science of character ; that it teaches men to build their lives up into a mould of moral beauty, and attain the stature of Christ. Who does not feel the nobility of that poor sculptor ? Who does not see that what he did was to preserve that which was nobler and better worth preserving than his body—the incarnation of his thought ? And if for art a man will do this, how much more should we do it for that which will survive when all the art of all the worlds is lost—the soul as we have made it, and as we may make it after the image of God ? Yes, art is much, but character is more ; and, as James

Smetham said, "it is of much more importance to preserve a fresh and tender love to God and man, than to turn the corner of an art career." Ah, brother! grasp that truth: that you are silently building up that which God will survey and judge; that you are building, instant by instant, a character; that you are building it even now, for—

This passing moment is an edifice
The Omnipotent Himself cannot rebuild.

But the apostle strikes a subtler chord when he speaks of the mixed elements that exist in the best work, of things perfect and imperfect—the gold and the stubble—that jostle one another in human character. He does not speak of one man as building with gold and costly stones, and another with wood and stubble, but of the same man as using all these elements. The words sound strangely, but undoubtedly St Paul's estimate of human nature is correct. We are apt to paint our picture of human nature in glowing primary colours: we admit no soft tones and gradations, we speak of a rogue as only a rogue, a saint as only a saint: but a subtler analysis will show us that there are points of contact between those most widely separated. No man is only a rogue and a knave, no man is only a saint. It is very well in melodrama to lay on the colours in glaring masses, but melodrama is not life. The one dramatist of genius of our day knows better, and shows himself of the kin of Shakespeare when he makes his vice a sort of decayed virtue, his knave

a man who has yet a thin streak of the gold of moral aspiration running through him, and his blameless man more blameable than his knave, by reason of the selfish egoism which corrupts him.

Who has not remarked the imperfections of religious men? Who has not seen, as St. Paul saw, that the same man has both gold and stubble in him, that his vision of truth is often limited and vitiated by some error of nature, that his flaws of temper exist side by side with a great apostolic passion for souls, or that his narrowness of sympathy spoils all the admirable grasp of truth which is his? The whole history of the Church has been a record of these imperfections. There is not a saint of the Old or New Testament we have not to apologise for on some point, nor has Christianity produced a single leader since who can escape censure. We have to acknowledge the hardness of Calvin, the military cruelty of Cromwell, the partisan temper of Whitfield, just as we have to apologise for the quarrel of Paul and Peter, and the early intolerance of John. There is no perfect Church and no perfect teacher: were we thus perfect, we should lose our need of Christ. When I see some men who spoil their ministries by freaks of passion, or intolerance of temper, or ignoble hesitations when great decisions are needed, I note other things also: perhaps the gross physical frame which is theirs, or the evil residuum of heredity which is in them, and the strain of natural tendency that sweeps through them, and which they have had to conquer; and I am only

thankful that they are what they are—and no worse. A high state of grace in some men means less than a low state of grace in others. And it was with a similar insight of compassion that St. Paul read human nature. He saw the gold and stubble side by side in the work of the best men; but he saw something of higher import—that, imperfect as they were, they did, to the measure of their power, build on the foundation-stone of Jesus Christ. What they were, and what we should be without Christ is the thing to remember, and if we are duly conscious of the stubble that is mixed in our own best attempts at goodness—the frequent stubble, the unfrequent gold—we shall learn charity even towards the unworthiest.

But the duty of charity towards others, which our own errors teach us, must not blind us to the main point of the passage, which is the testing of character which awaits us. We may be charitable to the faults of others, but we must show no charity to our own. Thus, the St. Paul who can acknowledge the better side of imperfect men can only speak of himself as the chief of sinners. He himself sees the fire that kindles for his trial, the purifying and avenging flame that is to test his work, and he would fain build only with such elements as the flames cannot consume. What, then, is this flame? What does it mean for us?

Surely time is one of the flames by which all our work is to be tested. Upon the pure gold time has no power. Many a great city has wholly dis-

appeared: the earthquake or the flame has swept over it; the chariot-wheels of the years have rolled across it and beaten it into nothingness: but still from its ruins we can recover the golden amulets its people wore, and two thousand years have wrought no injury to these. The gold has survived. Or, to take St. Paul's own illustration of building, there are edifices in the world so nobly wrought that time has only given them added grace, but has left no other mark upon them. But if the building is not good, time will infallibly reveal the flaw. When Peterborough cathedral was built it was built without foundations, and for seven hundred years the great church stood, and seemed stable. Then at last the tower fell, the walls cracked, and it became necessary to spend fifty thousand pounds to achieve that which ought to have been done at first. And it is so with character, with our work, and with our life. If we build hastily, if we have laid no sound foundations in real convictions, if our faith is merely an hereditary form of words, and our boasted good habits merely the result of a training which has left us no opportunity for the encouragement of pleasant vices: then time is our enemy, and in the day that we think not, long delayed as it may be, time will be avenged upon us.

Temptation also is the flame through which all character must pass. We may well pray each day for deliverance from evil, for no man can tell when he goes out of doors at morn what tremendous flame of temptation may spring up around him before the

day is done. Has it ever occurred to you how strange it was that Jesus should teach us to pray to God not to lead us into temptation? Why did Jesus say this? Because He had passed through the flame, and He knew that we were not able to bear it. He knew that only the pure gold could abide the fierceness of that burning, and that men like His disciples, Peter with his cowardice, John with his intolerance, all of them with hay and stubble in them, were so many inflammable natures to whom the fire was destructive. Ah! how could they bear the flame? But yet neither they nor we can wholly escape, because it is of the very order of life that we should be tested. The diviner and deeper prayer is that we may be delivered from evil; and there is but one deliverance, the possession of a character which the flame cannot wholly consume. Oh, how tragic is this parable of life! How many a man has gone in and out before men with a fair show: he has covered the stubble of his character with some thin veneer of gold or marble; he has looked strong, and has persuaded himself that he is strong; and then the fire has caught him, the inflammable passion of some unconquered lust in him has kindled, and in an hour a life has been undone, a character has perished.

But beyond time and temptation there lies the third trial, and it is of that St. Paul chiefly thinks: the last day—that day—the great assize. Can we, dare we, think of it? Will you for one single instant try to grasp the fact that the hour comes when all you know and see will be lost, all familiar faces, all familiar

habits ; when this very body will be no more, and no eye will be able by searching to find one atom of your dust in the soil that lies beneath the greenness of the earth or mingles in the mire of the roadway. And then, will you also try to realise that when all this has happened, you—your character, your soul—will be alive, and will pass through the flame of God Himself to its recompense ? Will you try to grasp the yet more awful fact that this may happen any hour, that at a signal from God all the workers on the scaffold will disperse and depart, all the hum of action will cease, and your character will stand in all its incompleteness, naked before eternity ?

Departed to the judgment,
A mighty afternoon,
Great clouds like ushers leaning,
Creation looking on.

The flesh surrendered—cancelled,
The bodiless begun ;
Two worlds, like audiences, disperse,
And leave the soul alone.

It is very terrible, so terrible that words can never express it, nor can we ever feel it as we should. But this at least we can ask ourselves : What manner of persons ought we to be, in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God ?

And yet there is one final word of consolation. Nothing that is really good in us can ever perish, or need fear that flame. Whatever is built upon the foundation of Jesus Christ, whatever habit

of humility or temper of charity, whatever spirit of gentleness, compassion, or virtue, whatever love of truth and passion for duty, whatever deed done worthily, even though imperfectly—this will be as pure gold upon which the fire of God will have no power. God will make no mistakes in the judgment; not a man or woman, not a rogue or saint, but will have full justice done to whatever of good there was in them. And wherever the pure gold of truth is found in any creed, in Buddhism or Christianity, in Catholicism or Protestantism, that gold will remain, for it will be error only, and wrong alone that can perish in that day. Oh ! it is a truth to rejoice in, that our God is indeed a consuming fire, for fire is the very type of all purity and vitality. If we love virtue, we shall be glad that we must pass through that flame, for it will mean that all that spoiled our virtue will perish there for ever, and all that was of Christ will abide. The flame is terrible only to impurity and hypocrisy, but the gold and precious stones it cannot harm.

Nay, more : we shall pray that an earlier flame than that flame of the last judgment may find and purify us ; that by any form of discipline which may seem good to God, as we are able to bear it, our character may be so tested that its imperfect elements may be purged away, and only the pure gold left.

And so our daily prayer will be :

One thing I of the Lord desire,
For all my way hath miry been :
Be it by water or by fire,
Oh make me clean !

So wash Thou me without, within,
Or purge with fire if that must be;
No matter how, if only sin,
Die out in me.

For if any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

THE SEPULCHRE IN THE GARDEN

"In the place where He was crucified, there was a
garden; and in the garden was a sepulchre."

JOHN xix. 41.

THE SEPULCHRE IN THE GARDEN

THAT is the tragedy of life—the Cross, the Garden, and the Sepulchre. They not merely lie close together; they are part of one another. In the place where He was crucified—that is, within sight of it, on the sunny slope of this hill of sorrow, was a garden, and as Christ went to His end, the fragrance of the garden met Him, and as He was lifted up, the beauty of the garden drew His dim and weary eyes. We know how Matthew Arnold pictured his dying hour, and prayed that he might then be wheeled to the open window, and see once more—

The wide aërial landscape spread,
The world that was ere I was born,
The world that lasts when I am dead.

It is a thought that may well calm us, but one also that is full of poignant pain. The world lasts, the world which man alone knows how to use, to interpret, and to enjoy, and man departs to his long oblivion. The cause for which his life has been spent needs him no more, and he departs. He goes out of life, broken, maimed, worn down with the contention of heroic passions, and Nature views his

end with immutable impassiveness. The Garden is there : what knows it of the Cross ? The sweet insolence of the light and of the flowers upbraids man and mocks him, as he hastens on his way to dusty death. Who has not felt something of this ? And who has not in such an hour been troubled with the sense of something unintelligible in human life, something tragic and mysterious, which the wisest cannot explain, nor reconcile, nor eliminate ? The Cross in the Garden : it is a new thought and a tragic one.

And in the Garden was a Sepulchre—that is not less tragic. It puts in a sentence what we feel to be most terrible in human life. For may we not interpret it thus, that we try to make a garden of life, but in the brightest garden there is the inevitable tomb ? We hide it with flowers and foliage, and would fain forget its tragic intrusion ; but it is there still, and we know it. We do not walk that way, we take other paths ; but ever and again we find that the path we took has suddenly led back, by some unexpected turn, to the Sepulchre : and we shudder and are afraid. It is of little service to us that we have covered the white doorways of the tomb with flowers, and have concealed its purpose ; we never forget that it is there. It has been said that the healthy man is not conscious of health ; but the living man is always silently conscious of death. The more beautiful the Garden is, the more does he resent the Sepulchre that is in it. And so at last it comes to pass that he often

does not see the Garden at all—only the Sepulchre. He cannot reconcile himself to it; he sees not the beauty of the world, but the sorrow of it; and when you talk to him of the joy of living, he replies with sad eyes: “Ah, but there is a Sepulchre in the Garden.”

Now, there are two ways of looking at life, and both these ways may be said to be indicated in this touch of exquisite and undesigned poetry. There is a Sepulchre in the Garden; but we might put the phrase another way, and say there is a Garden round the Sepulchre. It is human to see the Sepulchre in the Garden; Christianity teaches us to see the Garden round the Sepulchre. The first is the vision of pessimism; the second, of optimism. The first is the way in which the natural man takes the fact of death; the second is possible alone to the spiritual man.

Look first at the view of death which the natural man takes. There is no poet or philosopher of pagan or modern times who does not bear witness to the human dread of death. More than half of the poetry and philosophy of the world deals with this sorrow of all sorrows, the violent wrenching of man away from the light of day and the joy of living, and the consequent mystery that covers him when his footsteps have ceased to echo on the familiar roads of this world. Look at the higher imaginative literature of to-day, and you will notice the same fact. Look at the literature of science, and here it is magnified into even yet vaster proportion.

We do not see the Garden ; we see the Sepulchre. We do not see the fair and happy aspects of life, nor of Nature ; but we mark with fear a “ Nature red in tooth and claw with ravine,” and we terrify ourselves with the unquestionably tragic possibilities that lie in life. As civilisation progresses, that tendency becomes more and more marked. The price we pay for civilisation is a heavy one : it is a more sensitive mind, a more delicately balanced nature, a more vivid power of imagination. It is a result long since foreseen by Solomon, when he said that he who increases knowledge increases sorrow. The price of civilisation is a greater capacity of sorrow, and especially the sorrow that springs from a keener sense of the ills of life. Even the youth of to-day faints, and grows weary, and is afraid of life. He is not content to live his life with honest joy in it ; he is too busy analysing it. He is no longer “ the natural child of an unthinking day ” : his eye is large with visions of to-morrow. Science, that has taught us so much of the vast order and progress of the universe, has also uncovered for us so many frightful things, that, like children, we think most of the things that terrify us, and are finally afraid of life itself. And hence comes the pessimism which hangs over the civilised world like a cloud to-day. We do not see the Garden, we see the Sepulchre ; we miss the beauty of the flowers because we think only of the tomb they cover, but cannot hide.

Now, when men once begin to think in this way, another thing is apt to follow : the thought of the

Sepulchre dominates all other thoughts. Pessimism has always been the friend of suicide. The tomb which makes men forget the Garden soon draws men toward it. And this tendency we see all too clearly in our own time, when the increase of suicide is one of the most appalling social facts in all civilised countries. For in the lands we call uncivilised, nothing is so uncommon as suicide. The savage is "the natural child of an unthinking day." The Hebrew and the Oriental pray to-day, as they have prayed for centuries, for long life and length of days. They bear with stoicism the ills of life, because they have a passion for life itself, and an inextinguishable vitality of hope. The Bible, which throughout is the work of Oriental genius, throbs in every page with this energetic vitality; and the further back we go into the dim beginnings of the human race, the stronger do we find the joyous passion of living. It is only as we draw near to the great centres of civilised life—by which we mean life that is complex, sensitive, instructed, many-sided—that pale spectres meet us, who lift no eyes of gladness to the blue heavens, and see no luxury of colour in the summer world, but point with lean finger to something white among the trees, and say: "Ah, but there is a Sepulchre in the Garden."

Now, what are the causes of this poisonous pessimism? They are three; and the first is the seeming ineffectiveness of life. There is no pain that can assail a man so keen as the pain of believing himself ineffectual, futile, superfluous. The man

who has learned how to do any single thing better than the rest of the men he knows, has a motive for living. The man who feels that in ever such an insignificant degree he fits into the social order, and supplies a need, and helps the great machinery of the world to do its work, can take a certain pleasure in his life. But the man who is superfluous, and knows it; who can only do something that a thousand others can do as well or better; who feels that he can easily be replaced, and that if he departed, the world would close up as noiselessly and inevitably over him as the sea over the minute ripple where an air-bubble has broken; that man has the saddest of all fates allotted him. It is perhaps that, more than anything else, which makes the sadness of the city—it is full of superfluous people. The men who are able to feel that in some sense they are necessary to the community, that they fulfil a part which is appreciated and honoured, that on them depends some small burden of the great structure of society, are sadly few in proportion to those who feel this incurable sadness of futility. We shall never know what such men suffer; they cannot tell us. The men of genius who write the great fictions which depict the lives of others will never be able to tell us; the tragedy that goes on in the soul of the superfluous drudge has never yet been written. But we can at least see that this is one of the unmistakable facts of life, and that for such a man or woman life has few flowers: almost its best gift is that it promises a Sepulchre.

A second cause is weariness ; and closely related to this is the third, which I may call the monotony of life. I do not recite things that I have learned from a book : I look round on life as I know it ; on the human heart as I find it ; on the daily movements of life as I can measure them, and suffer by them ; and I ask you whether no sense of this monotony of life has ever weighed upon your soul ? Who has got all he wants, or, getting it, is satisfied ? Who has not found himself growing strangely tired all at once of the things that brought him joy, as though a cold wind, a cloud, had passed over the Garden, and the sunshine of life had vanished in an instant ? But there is one thing that does not vanish—the Sepulchre. The wind that beats the flowers to the earth lifts the foliage from the front of the Sepulchre, and it stands grey and ghostly and unmistakable before us. Life-weariness is one of the commonest of human maladies. Two-thirds of what we call the pleasures of life, and notably the artificial ones, are simply so many cunning inventions to keep us from thinking, and thus to kill in us the sense of the monotony of life. But at last, as men grow weary, they begin to think with gratitude of the tomb, and wish that they were at rest. The man who lives a purely personal life always thinks in this way of death. He has no sense of being part of a great whole, a link in the great destinies of the human race, and therefore he has no aversion to being detached from life. The Garden of Life lies round him ; the trees

which others have planted that he might enjoy their fruit ; but he is not grateful, and he plants for no one else. The field of the world is at his feet, with many a plot that cries for the toil of man, with interminable labours that yet wait to be done ; but he has taken what he can from life, and hastens to be gone. And this is another, and perhaps the most pitiable way, in which men see the Sepulchre but not the Garden : they are in love with death because they have missed the uses of life : they are ready to leave life because there is no longer anything that life can give them. And they leave the world with the cry : “I am tired of life : *vanitas vanitatum, omnia vanitas.*”

The monotony of life, its weariness, its apparent futility—these things make us see the Sepulchre in the Garden ; and to these may be added the genuine griefs of life. There are tragedies which overtake us in this world which make us realise the Sepulchre in the Garden so vividly that we never afterwards forget it. We have seen Love melt out of our embrace, and glide slowly through the Garden to that strange doorway among the trees ; and henceforth our eyes turn wistfully toward the place where he smiled and vanished. We have to say, with Browning :

All my days I'll go the softlier, sadlier,
For that dream's sake.

We still tread the Garden-paths, but memories are with us as we walk, and the flowers are seen through

a mist of tears. And for such a recollection of the Sepulchre there can be no blame: rather it is well for us to have a Sepulchre among the flowers, that when our eyes are drawn to evil we may look toward that and pray, and when our feet move in too foolish and forgetful a lightness on the greensward of the Garden, we may see that sanctuary of a past sorrow afar, and think. We would not put the Sepulchre out of the Garden, we who have buried love and grief there: it is a shrine. For some of us the memory of a mother's grave is a very real religion. We would not make our lives glad by forgetfulness of the gladness that has gone; rather we link it with all things sweet and beautiful that happen to us now, and the flowers we love best grow close to the thresholds of the Sepulchre. But what we need to remember is that even this way of thinking, noble as it is, is the thinking of the natural man. It is, after all, only what was felt by the pagans, and is still felt by the noblest types of pagan men and women. There is nothing distinctively Christian in this partial reconciliation to the Sepulchre. Christianity has a yet higher way of looking at it. What is that way? What does Christ say to those of us who, in one form or other, feel that this text touches our lives?

This is what Christianity does; it reverses the text. Its effect is to say, not "There is a Sepulchre in the Garden," as though that were the chief fact of life; but, "There is a Garden round the Sepulchre." Is that a paradox? I think not. I

think it conveys in poetic form the plain truth of what Christianity has to teach us of the manifold meanings of human life. And it is the voice of a serene optimism, the voice of a great hope, that recalls us from our weakness and self-despairing, and enables us to see the Sepulchre in its true light.

Look at it, then ; measure its meaning, and rejoice in it. There is a Garden round the Sepulchre. What Garden ? The Garden of an available happiness. When we say that Christianity taught blessedness and not happiness, we utter, after all, only a partial truth ; the whole truth is that it taught happiness by blessedness. As a matter of fact, the doctrine of Christ did make the early Christians happy. It put into their hands the secret of a perfect life. It taught them how to use life with true wisdom, with sobriety and reverence, and how to adjust themselves to its real nature. And because it taught them that, it showed them how large was the available happiness of life ; and that which filled with astonishment the great pagan nations by whom they suffered was the inexplicable miracle of their joyousness. The pagan was a pessimist ; every Christian was an optimist. The pagan was bitterly conscious of the tomb ; for the Christian, the tomb, as a thing of terror, was gone. It was covered in flowers ; it was obliterated in the Garden that had sprung up around it. And what had made the difference ? The possession of faith—faith that

God was the Heavenly Father; that the Sepulchre was the doorway of life; that all things were working for good, since God is good. If it be said, then, that Christianity was not meant to make men happy, it can only be said by those who use the word in a special sense, or are ignorant of Christianity. "Rejoice evermore; and again I say, rejoice!" is its watchword. It inculcates joy as a duty, hope as a habit, optimism as a faith. It says, No, the world is not evil—

It means intensely, and means good.

The business of man is to be happy, but happiness is to be found only in Christ's way. His business is not to feed his sad thoughts on the ills of life, not to recall his trials and forget his mercies, not to take life petulantly and peevishly, but to live it as God's good gift to men. And that is what I mean when I say that Christianity does not put the Sepulchre in the Garden—but the Garden round the Sepulchre. It puts a new meaning on life and death, which alters everything, and gives the true Christian the secret of a joy that fadeth not away, and a peace that passeth understanding.

So, again, when I say that Christianity puts a Garden round the Sepulchre, it is equivalent to saying that it diminishes the importance of death, because it magnifies the importance of life. Christ attached no importance whatever to dying. He did not fear death, and He taught His disciples not to fear it. His religion is absolutely a

religion for the common day. It magnifies to the last degree the value of man, the value of the most insignificant man, and of the part that he may play in the world. That Christianity deals with the hereafter no one can doubt; but Christ's own references to the hereafter are singularly few, compared with the tremendous stress He laid on present duty. And herein lies the lesson for the superfluous, the drudge who feels the monotony and futility of life, the man who thinks himself of no account, and is treated by the world as though he were of no account; Christ says: You mistake yourself—you are of infinite account. There is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth. You want to crawl into your tomb because you seem of no effect in this world: you are of effect, though you cannot see it. There is a Garden round the Sepulchre, and a Garden is the very type of the immense result which is obtained by the accumulation of small forces. It takes a million slight forces, all working to a common end, to make a garden: it takes millions of men to make a world. By so much as the meanest man lives rightly, the world is better, and something has been added to the store of its virtue; and by so much as he is evil and unthankful, the world is worse, as the garden is the worse for the unchecked weed. It is not the Sepulchre you are to think of—it is the Garden, the present hour, the moral flower and fruit of life, the growth of character. Death is a fact indeed, but life is an infinitely greater fact; and Christianity means nothing if it be not the art of living.

And the very juxtaposition of the Garden to the Sepulchre is the parable of that fact. The Sepulchre is but one thing in the Garden ; the Garden is vaster than the Sepulchre. And in that Garden life is ceaselessly fulfilling itself : progress is going on : the vital order of things is being perfected. Death is no new thing in the Garden ; but it is persistently eclipsed and forgotten in the life that evermore springs out of death. What is our work in this world ? It is to help on the world's progress. Nature wastes a thousand flowers before she reaches the perfect type ; let us not complain if our lives are exhausted in bringing in the nobler type :

Born to be wasted : even so
And doomed to fail—and lift no voice,
Yet not unblest, because I know
So many other souls rejoice.

It is a hard lesson doubtless, but it is the lesson of Christ. We submit ourselves to the great law of waste, the law that in Nature spills a million seeds and perfects one ; the law that in human progress exhausts race after race to produce a higher ; the law that permits heroes, and saints, and martyrs to die unrecognised, that long after they are dust their hopes may be fulfilled : we submit ourselves, as Christ did, who by what seemed the loss of life found life in the souls of men for evermore. You take the Sepulchre for the ultimate fact of life ; no, the dominating fact is the Garden. You think only of the ills of life, of which death is the tragic symbol ; think rather of the vast movement and

progress of life, which the Sepulchre never stays, and of which you are part. Feel the thrill of that endless straining forward after completion, that travail of a world ever rising higher, in which the sense of death is swallowed up in the higher sense of a life that never relaxes its energy, never ceases its endeavour after the ideal. Fool and coward, who thinkest only of death, rejoice rather that for a little while thou art alive ! See not the Sepulchre, but the Garden—the sweetness and beauty that man has made ; the Garden, ever spreading outward into the waste, and making it bloom and blossom as the rose, the gradually growing order and redemption of the world ; and be glad that you share this beauty, that you can help forward this progress, and that this spread of the Garden will go on till men regain “a statelier Eden,” a diviner Paradise.

All about us shadow still, but while the races flower
and fade,

Prophet-eyes may catch a glory slowly gaining on the
shade ;

Till the peoples all are one, and all their voices blend
in choric

Hallelujah to the Maker “It is finish’d! Man is
made.”

That is the vision of Christianity, that is the divine optimism it teaches ; and seeing this, death is already swallowed up in victory.

And all these thoughts take a new emphasis when there pass from our midst those great spirits who have made the world nobler by their presence. The world has lost this month a master musician,

and we are once more face to face with the Sepulchre in the Garden. How did Gounod regard the Sepulchre? As all great men have done—without fear and with growing hope. His own words were: “We shall soon know all. All will be explained. Light will dawn on all things, and you will find that the unknown is not so appalling. I am certain of it.” Are we not reminded by the words of the incalculable faith that Tennyson had in immortality, and of his contempt for death? There is even something of resemblance in the manner of departure: the great musician passes away to the music of his own requiem, the great poet to the last hopeful bugle-call of his own poetry. And whence this serenity? It was the serenity of faith. Both of poet and musician it is true that religion was the inspiration of the finest art of each, and religion taught the noble optimism which saw not the Sepulchre, but the Garden. And to you, who are troubled by the seemingly purposeless tragedy of life, I commend that fact. You are apt to treat religion as one of the many interests of life. It is not; it is the one interest. There is no peace for us till we are at peace with God, and no chance of noble work, or of great art, until our souls are calm in the security of faith. Great art, true living, noble work, spring alone from great faith. And therefore I bid you look not to the fact of death, but to the faith that conquers death. Approach the Sepulchre: behold, it is empty! Whoever lives well enters the Sepulchre only as a

man enters the gateway of a palace, and when we would follow him we say : "He is not there: he is risen—risen into immortality of influence, risen into fuller life, risen into the beatific vision and the bosom of God, and it is for ever and for ever well with him."

MEASURING A MINISTRY

"But none of these things move me, neither count I
my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course
with joy and the ministry which I have received of the
Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God."

ACTS xx. 24.

MEASURING A MINISTRY

IN these words the great spirit of Paul enshrines itself, and the moral vibration of his heroism penetrates us. Who, that is capable of noble enthusiasm, can look upon the scene unmoved? We are transported as he speaks to Ephesus as he knew it, and in the magic of a moment the spectacle of its ancient life lives and glows before us. To-day Ephesus is a heap of ruins, a splendid desolation; but in Paul's day it was the metropolis of the East. In its harbours the navies of the world anchored; its temple was one of the seven wonders of the world, less for its dimensions than its exquisite grace and symmetry; its theatre accommodated some thirty thousand persons; its gaiety, its wealth, its perfection in the arts, its air of splendid profusion, and bright voluptuous charm, made it what it has been well called—the “Vanity Fair of Asia.”

Into this city Paul had entered—an obscure Jew, unnoticed and unnoticeable. He looked upon it as no human eye had ever looked before. He looked upon

the city every side,
Far and wide:

All the mountains topped with temples, all the glades
Colonnades,

All the causeys, bridges, aqueducts, and then
All the men—

and it was there his gaze rested. He saw that the life of the whole people was honeycombed with licentiousness, and that the temple itself overshadowed the foulest purlieus of the vice. From the soul of this solitary man began to stream out a new regenerative force, the force of an intense moral sympathy. Amid the crumbling rottenness and moral decay of this splendid sinful city he stood, holding out to its people the secret of a new hope and a new life. And in three years, from this *débris* of corruption, he has built a church; he has preached Christ, and Christ has seemed anew incarnated in him. Many a Greek youth has ceased to follow the fatal feet of Mammon, and has cast aside the wine-stained garment of lust and put on Jesus Christ. Like Savonarola in a later day, the power of Paul has so subdued the city that a huge bonfire of the vanities has been lit, in which the magical books of the far-famed soothsayers of Ephesus have been consumed. By their own confession the trade of the idol-makers has been destroyed, but not without a sure revenge. The revenge of Ephesus is taken in the great riot which threatens Paul's life, and now drives him forth again, a wanderer and an exile.

“*Alas! for interrupted work!*” we say, as we read this marvellous record of moral victory. What, indeed, might not Paul have accomplished had no

sudden riot broken the spell of his influence, and driven him forth again to the inhumanities of man and the congregated woes of exile? But what we all need to recollect is, that life is a discipline of change, and in the great cycles of the divine purpose interrupted work is a thing unknown. We perpetually try to build tabernacles of rest and worship for ourselves upon the high mountains where ecstasy has visited us, and Christ as often rebukes the vanity of our desire. We long for fixedness, and God perpetually reminds us that here we have no continuing city, but seek one to come.

'There is no man that ever lived who has not had some faint unwhispered hope within him which has anticipated some future year of life, when life would give all he wants—fair fellowships and congenial leisure or congenial toil, freedom from the drudgeries of labour, a green and quiet spot, where the winds are low, and the passions and contentions of life are hushed, and the noise of its struggle is only heard like the pleasant thunder of the breaking wave upon a far-off shore. There is no man who has not resented the changes of his lot, and when the spirit of change has touched him, has not taken up his burden sullenly again, like some poor traveller expelled from a garden of rest, who goes out with weary heart and half-rebellious will. And there are few men to whom God has given grace and power, who have not thought themselves in some way necessary to God, necessary to His kingdom, to the city they have moved, to the Church they have

built up. But the divine order of life is otherwise. We have to learn the humbling yet soothing truth, that in God's kingdom the necessary man does not exist. We have to submit to unexplained providences, and march whither the Captain of our life wills us. There is a work for Paul beyond Ephesus; he must "preach the gospel in Rome also," and from this new exile will spring immortal fruit. God may have for us a work we have not dreamed of, a future larger than we know, and when His trumpet sounds the march, the tent must needs be struck without a murmur or a doubt. Did his work in Ephesus seem to Paul the consummation of his life struggle? Did it seem hard, cruel, bitter, to be thrust out again, and sent to plough new soil, just as the harvest began to ripen on the old? It is God's plan. Ephesus is but a single stepping-stone upon the great roads of destiny, and there is no finality but heaven.

Now, for us, the special value of this subject is that it may enable us to sum up what we mean by a minister and a ministry. Paul looks deep into his own heart, and there sees the sources of his life and measures its purposes. It is a supreme crisis of life, when eternity seems very near, and the arraignment before the judgment-seat of Christ an awful fact. There are moments in life for all of us when the noisy current of time is stilled, and some intense emotion lifts us, as it were, outside our life, so that we can look upon it impersonally and dispassionately. In such moments every outline of life stands out clear and definite, as the outlines of a landscape when the

pure light of evening falls upon it, and the hills seem miraculously near, and the heavens miraculously high. In the hour when the revelation of love comes to us, or the presence of death, or some long foreseen calamity, we instinctively enter into judgment with ourselves. A larger light is ours, which burns away old dubieties and insincerities, and we see the whole course and meaning of our life, as men in dreams, in one flash of larger intelligence, and in a mere moment, live their whole life again, and understand its drift and purpose. It is such a moment in the life of Paul. No man knew better than he that life without a purpose is impossible, and that purpose is the iron pen which graves eternal records on the tablets of destiny. And in this hour, when his heart is wrung with grief, he asked himself what was the real meaning of his life? He asked what he lived for, and had he lived in vain? Listen to his answer. "None of these things move me—so that I might finish my course with joy." To be a minister is the master-purpose of Paul's life; to be a faithful minister his supreme ambition.

We, too, have a ministry; we, too, call others our ministers; then let us examine our ideals, and see what it is we mean.

Now, behind this Christian conception of ministry there are two other conceptions, those of the priest and the prophet. We may dislike the word priest, because it has become associated with evil meanings, but do not let us forget that the priestly man has always been a fact in human life. Of God's goodness there

are continually sent into the world gracious and tender natures, which seem to breathe forth a mystic strength and consolation. There is a sweetness of disposition about them, a delicacy of fibre, a moral sensitiveness, a spiritual susceptibility, which marks them out amid a multitude as the anointed of the Lord. Such a mystic grace, we are told, seemed to distinguish the late Canon Liddon, even as a boy at school, so that the roughest lads felt the charm and strength of his character, and knew him to be a dedicated soul. Such men, by virtue of their special endowment and essential unworldliness, become the intermediaries between God and man. They stand between two worlds, and touch each; but the touch is surer on the unseen than on the seen. There is a spell about them which subdues and awes us as no magic of eloquence or mere force of intellectual gifts could do. What an atmosphere of serenity invests the true priest! How tenderly and graciously he stoops over our wounded hearts, and makes us feel that the heaven we have so often talked of half-scornfully is indeed a supreme reality. We have said a thousand times, "I believe in the resurrection of the body," but now, as we sit beside the dead and look upon the dreadful pallor of decay, it is another thing! We want some one then to make us believe what we only say that we believe; we want him to drag out of obscurity those truths which we believe that we believe; and so thrill them into life by his own spiritual assurance that henceforth they shall become assured and indubitable to us. And that is

what the truly priestly man does for us in such an hour. He touches our better self, and it lives. He stretches himself over our dead hopes, as Elisha over the dead child, and they catch the glow of vitality from his touch. He leaves us comforted and refreshed. We know that the old phrase, "A man of God," has still an application, for we can say, "A messenger from heaven has been with us this day." A priest, in our bigot meaning of the word, may I never be called, but a priestly man may God help me to be. For in such men dwells the secret of consolation, and there are too many grieved and wounded hearts in the world to make the ministry of consolation needless.

Again, there is the conception of the minister as the prophetic man. The priest moves in the world ; the prophet stands aloof from it. The one walks the common ways of human life clad in the white raiment of a higher spirit ; the other broods over the world with eyes that are purged to see its faults, its follies, its diseases, and its perils. The priest is the reconciler between God and man ; the prophet has no element of reconciliation in his nature. The priest allures, constrains, charms ; the prophet terrifies, alarms, overwhelms us. When he opens his lips it is to utter anathema ; it is to smite hypocrisy with a whip of scorpions ; it is to denounce judgment upon evil-doers ; it is to shatter the refuges of lies in which sentimental piety and callous wealth and sordid worldliness secure themselves, and to denounce upon them the doom of the fool.

Do not be mistaken ; a ministry without anger is a ministry without love, and where there is no flame there is no heat. Had the ministry of Paul confined itself to kind and tender deeds, no man would have sought to kill him ; it is not men like this that the world drags to the cross. But it was because the prophet and the priest were joined in his ideal of ministry, because he conceived that to serve the world in the fullest sense it was necessary not only to comfort the weary, but to attack with unsparing purpose the shams, the pretensions, the deadly hypocrisies of daily, customary, permitted and respectable life, that men rejected his ideal and slew him.

It is of God's mercy that these prophetic men also are born into the world ; men who cannot be content with things as they are, who will not bow down before the idol of custom, who have no respect for persons, who pass through the world like a storm, who rouse men into frantic antagonism or master them with irresistible moral compulsion. We always need such men ; the world cannot do without them. The storm-wind that clears the air of fever and miasma is not more necessary to human health than they to moral health. If there is a prophetic man in this city, make haste to listen to him. Bow yourself to his rebuke and repent ; for woe be to that city that knows not its prophets, or in which prophets cannot live. Let it not be said here, over some extinguished ministry, over some quiet grave where a broken heart moulders, as it was said long since over some heap of stones and bloody mire outside Jerusalem :

"Which of the prophets have ye not slain? From the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, who perished between the altar and the temple, verily, I say unto you, it shall be required of this generation."

And now go one step further, and you reach the vision of the ideal ministry which Paul exemplifies. He is a servant and a witness. And what is a servant? I need say nothing of the degradation which attached to service in the ancient world; it is enough to remind you that we ourselves have not yet freed service from degradation. The title of servant is not yet an honourable one, and it is little wonder that men and women resent the word so long as we make the office it represents so ungrateful. The servant in Paul's day and ours is one who occupies a lowly and obscure position, whose hands are roughened with insignificant toils and nameless drudgeries; whose life is largely governed by the will of another, and whose daily task is obedience to the will—perhaps to the caprice—of others; one who is divested of many rights and weighted with many disabilities; who in the best of conditions must always be obscure, and contented with obscurity, and must be willing to contribute to the happiness of others without hope of reward, recognition, or applause. We have advanced a long way, no doubt, since the day when the servant was a serf, whose very life was in the hand of his master; but far as we may advance in brotherhood and compassion, the essential restrictions of service still remain. There will always be tasks that must

be done by some one—lowly, humble, insignificant tasks, which little suit the pride and independence of the human heart, and he who does these tasks is called a servant. Yet that is the very title Christ chooses for Himself. If He chose a place among us to-day, that is the place which He would choose. He explicitly declares that it is a greater thing to serve than to be served, and Paul records in this very chapter a saying of Christ's, not elsewhere reported, that it is more blessed to give than to receive. If we are in any doubt as to Paul's meaning, we may remember that he called himself the slave of Jesus Christ. He believed that to be Christ's slave was better than to be the devil's freedman ; that freedom to do evil was a freedom to be parted with on the cheapest terms and at the first opportunity. He was one of those, and among the greatest of them, who live not for self, but for others ; not to get, but to give ; not to be saved, but to save ; not to build up the pyramid of his own intellectual culture, which the greatest mind of Germany described as the highest end of life, but to build up a new world of love and purity by the ceaseless ministrations of a consecrated service. He could even say that he was so lost in the thought of saving others that he could take little care of his own salvation ; he was ready to be blotted out of the Book of Life if by his destruction others might live. What a thing to say ! It sounds like a splendid blasphemy, the madness of magnanimity, the almost unpardonable recklessness of a sublime altruism ! Yet that is what he said, and he said it that he might

give superb emphasis to the truth that the ministry was an office in which no man had any right to think of himself ; the minister of Christ is a man dedicated to the service of the world.

Oh, look at this life, and who is not at once awed, ashamed, inspired ? Here is a man who had no secular ambition to fulfil, no purple of renown to covet, no greed of human greatness to gratify : he is the servant of Him who was servant of all. To wash the feet of the weary was to him a nobler distinction than to be served at the table of kings ; to go from house to house, amid insult, laughter, indifference, preaching the Gospel of Christ, was a nobler task than founding dynasties and empires or winning battlefields. There is no son of infamy, no daughter of shame, so low, so loathsome, so corrupt, that he dare leave them to their defilement. His life is mainly passed amid the lowest population of great cities. He shares the slum and the poverty ; he, the great scholar, the brilliant thinker, finds his daily associates in the coarse and brutal children whom the best of great cities leave uncared for—the gladiator and the Magdalene, the soldier and the slave ; at the highest the humble toiler, who, like himself, works with his hands. This “ministry” meant starvation, hardship, solitude ; exile from the halls of culture and the ease of home, familiarity with prisons such as felons have, familiarity with a suffering such as martyrs know. He had learned of Him who pleased not Himself. And when he left the lighted ways of fame for the prison and the scourge, when he turned

aside from the proud streets of great cities, where men rode robed in purple or moved amid the breath of praise, for his poor lodging in the worst inn's worst room, for his scorned exile and daily pain ; when life became one long disaster, one living, throbbing martyrdom, he could say with absolute serenity of soul : "None of these things move me—if I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received from the Lord Jesus."

Nor was this all. The ministry meant for Paul one other thing, and the chief of all—it was a testimony. He was a witness of the gospel of the grace of God. His crowning argument was himself. He had no speculations to elaborate, no new philosophy to establish. He entered the great schools of Greek learning not to add another cult, or play the part of a new Socrates ; his was a sublimer and far simpler mission. He came to tell them that he was once blind, but now he saw ; he was once a blasphemer, but now a missionary of the Name he had blasphemed. His constant test was experience. What he had been he knew others were ; what he was he knew they might become. With sublime egoism he called attention to himself, and said : "I, Paul, a blasphemer and injurious—an apostle by the grace of God, salute you." He was a witness to two things : that once he was a sinner, that now he was a sinner saved. He took it for granted that all men were sinners—that was indisputable. What he had to tell them was how they might cease from sin ; they should know the truth, and the truth should make them free. To the

mere speculative opinions of Greek philosophy he paid no heed ; he said : “ I, Paul : never mind how you explain the origin of things, explain me ! ” To the question, how this great change was wrought in him, he had one unvarying reply : he testified the gospel of the grace of God. Before synagogue and sanhedrim, mobs and magistrates, keepers of gaols and Roman governors, wherever we follow him, the same words are on his lips.

And that is the crowning element in the Christian ministry. We base everything upon the experience of the individual. The ministry is a perpetual witness to one supreme spiritual fact, that sin may be forgiven, and that man may know it is forgiven ; that the whole bias of a life may be changed, and changed in a moment. We call up out of the ages an innumerable array of witnesses—gladiators of old Rome, scholars of Alexandria ; men with the brand of martyr-fire upon their foreheads, women with the stain of martyr-blood upon their raiment ; men of Augustine’s day and men of Luther’s ; silent, prayerful men like Thomas à Kempis, men of indomitable activity like John Knox ; students, merchants, soldiers, slaves ; some on the highest steps of fame, some toiling in the lowest places of the lowly ; but all witnesses, and witnesses of one thing, a supreme fact which outlives every century, and accommodates itself to every type of man—the vital power of the gospel of the grace of God. If I cannot tell you that I am a witness to that power of Christ to save, I am no minister, and never can be one. If I can witness to that, whatever gift or glory I may

lack, I have at least one element of the minister of Christ: I know in whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He will keep that which I have committed to Him against the eternal day.

The gospel of grace—that, then, is the gospel of the supernatural: of a divine interference in human life, of an unseen Helper who lifts us up, and heals us of our self-despisings, and quickens us with hope: that is the only message that can be called a gospel, and the only thing worth preaching. Think how full the world is of lonely and ignored and unloved people, of feeble wills and fettered sympathies: people for whom life never has meant, and never can mean, anything but failure. How many are there among us who are tortured with the monotony of life? How many who are tired of life, because tired of ineffectual struggle, and of days and weeks with no broad horizons and no stimulus of hope? How many who are simply oppressed with their own insignificance, the sense of being of no importance to anybody; and how many more who have failed in life through the moral decay that comes from base appetites and evil habits! And it is to you the gospel of grace comes. It is the assurance that you are not unimportant to God, not forgotten of Him, and not cast off. Can you wonder that an immense hope traversed Europe when Paul preached that message? And it is this kindling of hope that still saves men, and is the dayspring from on high in lonely and unnoticed lives. If there be one thing that I thank God for more than another, it is that I

have been enabled to rekindle the torch of hope in failing hands : that I have helped the discouraged, the lonely and perplexed, with some borrowed gleam of the optimism of the Gospel. There is no nobler form of human service than to keep the light of hope burning when it has gone out in others. Surely that is a joy beyond joy, and it will endure.

When the world grows old,
And the sun grows cold,
And the leaves of the judgment book unfold.

From this whole conception of the ministry is not another thing clear: that he who lives in closest touch with his fellow-men is the truest minister of Christ? We want two things to-day: the secularisation of the ministry, and the socialisation of the Churches. The minister must throw off his professionalism or perish; and the Church must throw off her ideals of respectability. Why is it that the average masculine mind in great cities is not kindly to the minister? Because it suspects him of being out of touch with the real facts of life, and outside the real boiling tide of its temptations. Why is it that the Church is the religious club of the few, and has little attraction for the many? Because it is not true to the social ideas of Jesus. We have lost our Christ under an immense mass of ecclesiasticism, and the minister has thus come to be looked upon as a distinct species differing from the man. And here, once more, Paul becomes our pattern: and it is this man, who works with his

hands, who embraces every side of life in his experience, who is so human in his sympathies, so alert in his secular knowledge, so keen with almost worldly shrewdness in his treatment of difficulties, and yet so wholly spiritual in his temper and ideals—it is he who is the highest type of minister.

And what I mean by the secularisation of the ministry is, that we want as preachers men who know life as Paul knew it, who are familiar with its swiftest currents, its innermost difficulties; who have a broad understanding of men and a catholic charity, who are not afraid to mix with all sorts and conditions of men as Christ did, and in whom all the aloofness of a separated class has perished. "Oh, that all the people were priests," was the ancient prayer, and it expresses the true ideal of Christianity. I make claim to nothing that you—the humblest and simplest of you—may not claim too. When the youthful soldier stands firm to principle, amid the jeerings of his comrades, when he speaks the difficult right word, and does the difficult right deed, when you do some neighbourly act of kindness and compassion, when you put yourself to inconvenience to instruct the ignorant, to succour the needy, to comfort the unhappy—in all this you are the true minister of Jesus Christ. You are fulfilling the spirit of Him who said it was more blessed to give than to receive. You are helping onward that kingdom in which war and lust, and greed and lovelessness, and fraud and violence will all have disappeared. Oh, is not that a programme

worthy of the most covetous ambition? And amid the thick of the most crowded, most laborious, and humblest life it may be fulfilled. There is always standing-room in life to live as Christ lived, and this great saying of Paul's may be uttered, and is uttered, by countless unknown martyrs and confessors, soldiers and crusaders, every day, who amid the shocks of life are true to Christ, true to self, and true to duty.

Such was Paul, such his ministry. And now let us mark his final estimate of his life-work. In this solemn moment of farewell death seems to him a very clear and very near reality. The ending of a ministry is like the ending of a life. All parting has the whisper of the last farewell in it; it is the shadow thrown by the advancing figure of death. It is another leaf turned in the book, another act played in the great drama, and Paul feels that he is getting nearer to the falling curtain and the finis. He sees old struggles from the point of peace above the passion of the struggle; he looks back and reads the past with the wise discernment which comes when all its forces have passed into repose, and he sees that his life is justified. Life is to be measured by its end, its spirit, its achievement; and life for Paul has had so supreme an aim that to attain that aim death itself is a price worth paying.

Sabbath by Sabbath this ministry, this function of preaching, goes on: do we not often forget that while one preaches and many hear we have *lived*, and that some definite results have been registered for

each of us ? Oh pause, then, and let us measure ourselves against the great words of Paul : "I hold not my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received from the Lord Jesus." Life ! Yet that is what men hold dearest. There are hours when it is a luxury to be alive. There are hours when only to feel the full pulse beat, and the bright fancy flash across the mind, and the strong hand lift itself in unimpeded energy, is bliss. And in such times nothing seems so terrible to us as death. The bitterest pains of poverty, the anguish of the outcast, the solitude of the exile, the gloom of shame, the shelter of infamy —all or any seem better than

To lie in cold obstruction, and to rot,
This sensible warm motion to become
A kneaded clod.

We cling to the merest life ; to see the sun with the dimmest eyes seems better than to lie down in the hideous dishonours of the grave. Oh, do you feel that strong horror of death ? Do you, the young, the vigorous, the eager, share this strong passion of life—life at any price ? Then pause and think. Is there no life beyond the pulsing blood ? Is there no life of patriotism for which the soldier spills his blood like water on the battlefield ? Is there no life of honour, rather than forfeit which noble men would die a hundred deaths ? Are there not many things better than life and harder to endure than death ? I tell you that life is never so

dear that you can afford to buy it at the price of cowardice, or shame, or lack of intellectual integrity, or sacrifice of spiritual sincerity. There is a life that is more than life, higher than life, diviner than life ; and he is not worthy to live who is not ready to die for the truth that is most vital to him, and the conviction that is divinest. And in the close of life, if never before, we cannot fail to realise that it is this fidelity to our best selves alone which can give the sense of completeness and unity to our life. Even if it were true, as we have been told it is, that we do not really desire a hereafter half so much as we think we do ; and if it were also true that our dream of the hereafter is altogether vain ; yet no noble-minded man could be content to live a life that was false to his highest intuitions. For if no higher visions are vouchsafed us, it is still the one supreme consolation of a man when he leaves life to be able to say :

Enough, if something from my hands have power,
To live and act and serve the future hour.

If ever these thoughts have power to touch us it should be now ; for in a manner, as I have said, we anticipate the closing of life itself in the closing of a ministry. A period of life passes from us, rounded and complete, and we must estimate it, not by its accidents, but its end. It is the finished course which Paul contemplates. And the time is fast coming when all the scattered threads of life will be gathered up, and its completed fabric lie before us on the stilled looms of action.

Its accidents will be dwarfed into nothingness; whether we were rich or poor, honoured or contemned, will be less than nothing. God will want to know what was the purpose of our life, and we shall know whether that purpose is achieved. To say in such an hour, "I have not shunned to declare all the counsel of God"; to appeal to the integrity of influence, "I am pure from the blood of all men"; to challenge scrutiny, and declare, "I have coveted no man's silver or gold"; to point to a life dominated by one noble purpose, never swerving from it, sacrificing all to it, reaching it at last—that only is the true triumph of life. And what matter passing sorrows and disappointments, if we finish our course with joy? Who thinks of past storms when the daybreak shows the desired haven close at hand? What are pain and poverty, the scorn of Ephesus, the weeping at Miletus, if the light affliction has worked out a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory? Now, it may be, we are distracted by a thousand lesser issues. We covet honour and desire ease; we shrink from scorn, and unrequited labour, and unmerited reproach, and slanderous tongues, and man's ingratitude; but then there will be nothing to be feared but our own self-reproach, and nothing coveted but God's "Well done!" Are we living for that? Are our lives new incarnations of Christ? If so, we can understand the glow that lights the wasted face of Paul, the thrill which quivers in his voice, the noble music of that speech which stills the weeping of the elders, and floats over the grey sea like a song of

triumph: "Neither hold I my life dear unto myself, if I may finish my course with joy."

"None of these things move me." What things? Nothing in the past. Think of what this man's history had been. Stoned at Lystra, beaten at Philippi, in prison with Silas, scourged with forty stripes save one, a day and night in the sea, worn with fastings, hunted out of every city, suffering weariness, nakedness, peril, and the thorn in the flesh; and, added to this, the slander of the serpent tongue, "pilloried on infamy's high stage," and shunned as the offscouring of all things—this man has faced a world in arms. Jew and Gentile, magistrate and rabble, heathen and his own countrymen, have been reconciled in an awful unanimity of hatred of this wandering Rabbi who preaches Christ. Yet what does he say? Does he repine, or murmur, or charge God foolishly? Does he abate one jot of hope or courage? Behold, a light gleams upon the furrowed face, the worn form dilates as with a sense of triumph, and is no longer insignificant, and the hoarse diapason of the sea mingles with his speech, and is as noble music set to noble words, as he cries: "But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I may finish my course with joy."

And what of the present? Is not this failure? The elders must needs meet him at Miletus, for he dare not revisit Ephesus. He has been hunted out of Ephesus by ignorance; his work is shattered,

and in the grey morning the ship waits him which is to bear him on an unknown voyage. Yes, it is seeming failure—but that is all. He has sown the seed; he has dropped the leaven of Jesus into the corrupt life of Ephesus. It must increase till the whole is leavened. Ephesus shall yet become one of the great schools of Christianity. His foes have but trampled in the seed. As for him, he already hears the heavenly reapers singing in the city squares, and sees the cross gleam upon its splendid temple, and hears the alleluias of the martyrs ringing round the amphitheatre of slaughter, and he cries: “What mean ye to weep and to break my heart? None of these things move me.”

Look onward to the future, and what of that? Years have passed away, and ceaseless toil and pain have bowed him down, and age has left its trace upon him. He has been to Jerusalem; he has proved the truth of his forecast, that in every city bonds and afflictions awaited him; he has stood before Felix and Agrippa; he has been wrecked at Malta, and has been summoned before Nero; he has filled up in his body that which was lacking of the sufferings of Christ. What do men look for in old age? Honour, peace, the quiet of achievement, the pride of success. What does Paul find? He is old and friendless; his home is a dungeon; he is shivering with the winter cold, and writes pathetically for the cloak that he left at Troas; he is weary with the tedious hours, and asks for the books, but especially the parchments. He is

conscious of having made no mark on the world, and that world is still hostile to his Master. With what feeling do old men regard the past? Even the greatest of them have confessed to bitter disappointment. The great philosopher of the sixteenth century says, "Men are not worth the trouble I have taken over them"; the great theologian of the same period cries, "All I have done has been worth nothing, and I am a miserable creature"; the most brilliant of modern statesmen sums up life in the acrid epigram, "Youth is folly, manhood is struggle, old age is regret."

Now draw near to this Mamertine dungeon, where the last hours of Paul are spent. A narrow room, a solitary man. Once already he has appeared before the supreme tribunal; soon he will be summoned there again, and the sentence will be death. So that we may say we look upon a doomed man, and as we look we hear the steps at the door, we see the morning break, the three-miles march of ignominy, the halt, the silence, the swift blow of death. Look over his shoulder, for he is writing, unmoved by any vision of disaster. It is said that when Handel wrote the "Hallelujah Chorus" he said he saw heaven opened, and all the angels, and the great God Himself. It is surely some such vision Paul sees as he writes to this young timid racer who is to take up the torch of truth when he is gone. There is no touch of regret even in his farewell; there is only a tranquillity which overcomes the soul, a triumph which amazes it: "I have fought the good fight, I have

finished my course, I have kept the faith ! ” He has indeed triumphed ; he has not been moved ; he has finished his course with joy.

Sublime spirit ! Heroic soul ! Go forth to thy shameful fate, but know thou goest forth to victory ! Thou goest not alone ; from the unborn ages thousands follow who shall tread the road of martyrdom with ecstasy, and hail the day of death with solemn joy. Rest in thy glory, for thy work is done : “ Henceforth beyond the reach of frailty thou shalt be present, from the divine height of thy peace, in the infinite consequences of thy acts.” A thousand times more living and more loved than when thy voice stilled the weeping of the elders and pierced the clamour of the mob, thou shalt live for ever in the undying life of thy great thoughts and magnificent example. Death has been powerless against thee ; yea, we seem to hear thy voice pealing from the firmament thine own immortal words : “ O death ! where is thy sting ? O grave ! where is thy victory ? ”

Happy soul, thy days are ended,
All thy mourning days below ;
Go, by angel-guards attended,
To the sight of Jesus, go.

Thou hast entered into rest ; thou hast gained thy blessed consummation, and thy works do follow thee !

Dawson, William James, 1854-1928.

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